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THE PARDS.

KID-GLOVE KIT AND PARD

OR,

The Gold King of Weird Canyon.

BY MAJ. H. B. STODDARD, *Ex-Scout*,
AUTHOR OF "RAPIER RAPHAEL," "KID-GLOVE KIT,"
"THE BOY VIGILANTES," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

A TREACHEROUS BLOW.

"CRAIG COLTON, you're a regular chump!"

"Thanks!"

"To have had this magnificent fortune in your very grasp, and then to allow it to slip away from you!

"Why it's enough to drive a man crazy."

"My dear Curt, consider—"

"I have considered, and it is because I have so thoroughly investigated everything that I am so vexed."

"It is easy to see that you have never been struck, or nearly so, by lightning."

"The most remarkable thing about the whole matter is that I was not instantly killed. For days afterward I suffered, and my mind was in such a state that I could think of, or do nothing with any interest."

"Well, if such be the case, and as spilt milk is not worth crying over, we will drop the past and think of the future."

"You have no clew whatever, I suppose?"

"Not the slightest."

"Then what do you propose?"

"It is to consult about our future plans that I am now in New York."

"Well, give me your ideas on the subject."

"Certainly. There is but one way to act, it seems to me."

"And that is?"

"For me to return to Colorado, take up my headquarters at The Gulch, and there await developments."

"And what do you expect from this?"

"That I may be able to learn, from the movements of Kit Barton, where the place we are in search of is located."

"And if you should succeed?"

"Why then—well, we would, I fear, be compelled to 'remove' him, and, he once out of the way, we could enter into peaceable possession of our wealth."

"But did you not say he was lately married to Danford's daughter?"

"A month ago."

"And what about her?"

"A good wife always follows her husband."

"Colton, you are the most villainously and coldly cruel desperado I ever met."

"You are complimentary."

"Truthful, at all events."

"But you are right; they must both be done away with, or we will never be safe."

It was long after midnight, and the two men who were thus plotting were seated in a downtown office, with the windows so closely curtained that not a ray of light stole out into the darkness of the street.

The hour, the night—which was stormy and blustering—were in perfect accord with the plot against human life which these two men were concocting.

Craig Colton, the coolest, most desperate villain that ever drew revolver or stabbed a man behind his back, was evidently the chief spirit of the two, and although Curt Bentley, as his companion was named, some times became aggressive and spoke to Colton as to an inferior, he evidently feared him, and watched him, warily, as if suspecting something, he knew not exactly what.

Bentley was a lawyer, and in his practice, which was extensive, had amassed a thousand facts, which he was evidently disposed to use to further his own ends.

He was the head, Colton the arm, of the partnership.

He conceived, Colton executed, and no two men could have been found in all the length and breadth of the metropolis who were more admirably suited to each other.

"Then," said Colton, rising, and taking his silk-lined coat from the back of a chair, where he had carelessly flung it on entering, "it is understood.

"I return to Colorado and there will remain until something turns up. You shall hear from me from time to time, and may rely upon my keeping you thoroughly posted. You have nothing further to tell me?"

For a moment the other did not answer, but went to a small safe in the corner, and opened it, taking from one of the compartments inside a worn pocket-book, stuffed with papers.

After examining these carefully, he drew from the package a half-sheet of note-paper, and returned to his former seat.

"Here," said he, "is the most important of all the writings that I have that bear on the subject we were discussing. It come into my possession by accident, and although of not much value in its present condition, may be utilized some time. I am not very good at unraveling riddles or anything of that sort, and after much study, gave it up in despair."

"That is one of my strongest holds; let's see it a moment."

"Not to-night; this is too valuable to part with, and is the only thing I have that you are not familiar with. If I should give it to you, who knows what might be the result? You will pardon my frankness, Colton, but I have not the highest opinion of your integrity and honor."

"What do you mean?" thundered the other, his face becoming livid from the insult.

"Exactly what I say. I firmly believe that

you would be only too glad to throw me overboard, did I give you the opportunity, and had I nothing with which to hold you in check. So, for fear of accidents, I will again return this to the safe, and when I shall have heard from you regarding your movements, and in black and white have proof of your complicity in this plot, then, and not until then, I will send you a copy of this, retaining the original in case of trouble."

And then, rising, he once more walked to the safe, and was about to replace the scrap of paper in a separate compartment, when a slight noise behind him caused him to turn his head.

Colton had risen and was leaping toward him, a long, murderous-looking knife in his hand, his eyes blazing and the look of an assassin stamped on his cruel face.

Bentley, realizing that his life was in imminent danger, raised his hand and tried in vain to ward off the already descending blow, but it was too late!

Changing the direction of his stroke like lightning, Colton's steel flashed under the uplifted arm of the other, and was buried to the hilt in his side, when he fell to the carpet, his hand pressed to his side, whence the blood gushed in torrents, and lay groveling in the agony of approaching death.

Picking up a newspaper from an adjacent chair, Colton coolly wiped the blood from his knife, stooped and unclasped the clutching fingers that still grasped the paper which was the price of Bentley's life, placed the half-sheet carefully in his pocket, and turning out the gas, left the room, the spring-lock fastening the door as he closed it, and quietly left the building.

A passing cab, returning empty from Brooklyn, was hailed, and in it Colton was soon driven to a fashionable up-town hotel, where he secured his key and with a pleasant "good-night," or rather "good-morning," to the clerk, he went up-stairs to his rooms, closed the door and blinds, lighted the gas, and with a cigar between his lips, drew an easy-chair to the fire and, taking the torn paper from his pocket, began to read it carefully.

CHAPTER II.

THE TORN LETTER.

The sheet was torn, in a jagged manner from top to bottom, and was crumpled on one side as if a rude hand had grasped it and snatched it away from the person holding it.

Colton smoothed it out carefully and holding it so that the light fell fair upon it, read these words:

"MY DEAR CHILD:—

"Fearing
happen to me, I wri
for you, that you
the mine which wi
From a point nor
are familiar wi
south-east, an
one hundred
ding into
in the be
Chip awa
it can be ra
Through the open
Follow on down the
find something tha
attention, which inves
"Your loving f

"HENRY DA'

When he had read and re-read these words and portions of words, again and again, Colton allowed his hand to drop on his knee, and gazing into the glowing bed of coals in the grate, pondered long and silently.

At length, he roused himself and, removing his cigar from his lips, muttered:

"I might have saved myself the trouble of giving Bentley his quietus, for all the benefit that is liable to arise from the possession of this scrap. I am more in the dark than ever; but, Curt was getting decidedly arrogant and used some language which no gentleman could endure. He deserved a lesson and it was taught him in first-class style. And, besides all this, he is much better out of the way, for in the event of the successful termination of my scheme I would have been compelled to halve the proceeds with him, which would have been robbing myself. And then, he was a poor partner to have; his sickening qualms of conscience invariably disgusted me. I'm glad he's dead."

And with a yawn, Colton arose and was about to undress, when his eye caught sight of the scrap of paper that had fluttered to the floor while he had been thinking.

"As dead men tell no tales, so burned letters reveal no secrets, I will reduce this to ashes before I seek my downy couch."

And he picked up the torn document, and

leaning over the fire, was about to drop it into the blaze, when he drew back.

"There's no telling of what service this may yet be to me," he continued; "so I had best preserve it for future reference. With study and a thorough knowledge of the country, I may be able to utilize it," and carefully placing it in an inner compartment of his pocket-book, he quickly undressed, and getting into bed, after putting out the light, was soon sleeping as peacefully as a child.

The sun was streaming brightly into his room when he awoke, a few hours later, for the storm had ceased and the air was clear, cold and crisp.

In a short time he was seated at the breakfast table, with a pile of newspapers at his side, at one or the other of which he glanced from time to time, while discussing his breakfast.

Suddenly an item caught his eye in which he seemed to be interested, and turning down the page he read it carefully.

The paragraph was in the column devoted to the movements of distinguished persons, and was thus worded:

"Mr. Christopher Barton, the young Colorado millionaire, who has been stopping at the Windsor for a month past, having come East on his wedding trip, returned to the West to-day, accompanied by his charming bride. Mr. Barton's interests in the Centennial State, are so enormous, that they demand his personal attention; but he hopes soon to have matters in such shape that he can return and reside in New York permanently."

"So!" murmured Colton, "my young friends leave to-day for The Gulch, in all probability, and evidently intend to secure Dainty's fortune. I would give much to know if that tin box contained the clew to the mine. If it did, all the better; if they find it, I will be on hand to take possession. I'll go West with them, provided they do not leave before this evening."

And having finished his breakfast, he left the dining-room, went up-stairs and changed his coat, which was a fashionably cut Prince Albert, for a walking-coat, drew on his gloves and left the house.

Walking up-town some little distance, avoiding as far as possible the principal streets, not caring, apparently not wishing to meet anyone with whom he was acquainted, secured a passing cab and was driven far up Third avenue to Harlem.

Here he paid his coachman, and again set out on foot, continuing on near the river until he arrived at a small shanty, which, from the various signs it bore, was evidently a restaurant of the lower order.

Entering, and casting a rapid glance around he was relieved to see that the dark room was untenanted save by a small boy, whose look of shrewd intelligence gave indication of a precocity far beyond the ordinary.

"Where's Jim?" asked Colton, approaching the stained counter.

"Gone down-town."

"Coming back soon?"

"Not till late."

"Any one up-stairs?"

"Nup."

"Then give me the key of the back room, and come up and light a fire. It's cold enough to freeze a polar bear."

"An' who'll tend bar while I'm trottin' 'round a-waitin' on you?"

"I will."

"Yes, and git away with ther till!"

A sounding slap across the boy's cheek was the only answer to this impertinence, and the young vagabond went flying to the other end of the room, while he uttered a hundred grumbling and growling threats.

But he said nothing aloud, and apparently entirely subdued, took a key from a half-hidden drawer, and handed it to Colton without a word.

The man then left the room by a side door, and mounting the dark stairs outside, was soon heard to open and shut a door overhead, and then all became still, while the boy, after muttering to himself for a time, seated himself in the corner, and was soon immersed in the pages of a story of the West.

CHAPTER III.

A COMPLETE DISGUISE.

It was probably an hour after the time when Colton had disappeared when the door through which he had gone out again opened, and a man, of apparently sixty years, entered the bar-room.

The place was still deserted, for most of its patrons were night-birds, and only met there when the shades of evening had descended and the lights flickered down the avenue.

The boy in charge had fallen asleep, and noth-

ing was to be heard save his loud snoring and the far-off rumble of the elevated road.

The new-comer carried a sachet in his hand, and was dressed in a long dark-blue coat, trowsers of a dark material, a silk hat and a heavy chinchilla overcoat.

He wore a full beard and mustache, both of which were tinged with gray, while his hair, originally coal-black, was now streaked with threads of silver.

Rapping heavily on the counter, he aroused the boy, who rose slowly and walked to the bar, and surlily asked:

"Well, what does yer want?"

"I have a friend who told me to meet him him here," replied the stranger in a deep voice. "Is there any one but you about?"

"Nary one."

"But I am sure my friend must have been here."

"W'ot's his name?"

"Mr. Colton."

"Hain't been here."

"You know him, do you?"

"Seen him once, when his buggy broke down in front of ther shop, and I held his horse. The feller w'ot was with him called him Colton, an' when he tipped me a fiver, 'twa'n't likely as how I war a-goin' fur ter furgit him."

"Very strange," muttered the stranger. "I cannot understand it."

"I kin," chuckled the boy.

"And how?"

"W'ot's ther use o' playin' any games on me, say, Mr. Colton? Does yer take me fer a Connecticut detective, an' think I don't know nothin'?"

The disguised man started and seemed for a moment entirely discomfited at his recognition, but, curbing himself with an effort, he addressed the boy in milder tones than he had yet used, at the same time tossing a twenty-dollar bill on the counter.

"Take that for yourself, Ted, and now tell me, how did you recognize me?"

"Ef I had met yer outside, captain, I'd never had 'a' known yer; but, seein' as how ther bell over ther front door always rings when any duffer opens it, I knew yer couldn't 'a' come in *that* way. Naterally, in conserkence, yer must 'a' come from up yonder, an' it couldn't be nobody but Captain Colton, Esquire; d'ye tumble?"

"Shut up, you young idiot!" whispered Colton, for he it was, as a step was heard outside and the door being thrown open, the bell jangled loudly.

The new-comer was a man of forty or forty-five, short, thick-set, brawny, and possessing one of the most singular countenances that ever mortal wore.

That he was the proprietor of the place was evident from the manner in which he entered, and walked behind the bar.

Turning, he looked intently at the man who was still leaning against the counter, but evidently thought him a stranger, and paid no further attention to him until Colton spoke and invited the proprietor to join him in a social drink.

"Don't care 'f I do, see'n' as its pretty cold. W'ot'll it be?"

And the two glasses being filled, they clinked tumblers and drank to each other's health.

"Your boy there told me you would not be back until after dark," said Colton, evidently desirous of continuing the conversation.

"Didn't expect ter be back, but I remembered that I had ter meet er feller here about this time, so I came right up."

"I expected to meet a gentleman here, at about this hour, too," and pulling out his watch, he glanced at it and added:

"After two o'clock! Strange he has not shown up. Do you know a Mr. Colton?"

"Craig Colton? Should think I did!"

"Me 'n' him's pertikler chums."

"Well, he's the person I am waiting for."

"Givin' me a breeze or is this on the level?"

"It is on the dead level."

"Maybe it's all O. K., but—"

"Oh, of course it's all O. K.," and resuming his natural voice Colton continued:

"The test is sufficient. If you didn't recognize me, I don't fear those whom I am going to visit."

"Well! Fry me over a slow fire, captain, ef I knewd yer! That's ther best yer ever did; shake!"

"I knewd him in a minnit!" broke in the shrill voice of the young imp, who was standing near, grinning at his employer's amazement.

"Well, Cap, w'ot's the word?"

"I may go away this evening, and will want

you to go with me. You can either shut up the shop, or leave it in charge of Ted. We may need it in the future."

"All right: I kin git ready in a minnit."

"I'll take Ted with me and send you word, if I decide to go, in ample time for you to meet me at the depot. The train leaves about six o'clock, I think."

"Which way are ye bound, Cap?"

"West."

"Ter Colorado?"

"Yes."

"Ennything new about ther mine?"

"Not much, but I hope to learn something soon after I get there. Ted," turning to the boy; "you jump up-stairs and put on your messenger's suit. Skip, now, and see how fast you can be."

And as the boy hurried out of the room, he again turned to the proprietor:

"Lock up when we are gone, and go up-stairs and fix yourself up. Shave and put on your black broadcloth suit, the one I sent up yesterday. Take off your beard, mustache, everything, and when you are dressed, take the 'L' down-town, and meet me at the Grand Union. Bring your sachel with you, and get a room, saying you want to write for a few hours."

And the boy returning, Colton left the saloon, followed by Ted, who carried his sachel, and, walking over to Third avenue, reached the station and took the train down-town.

CHAPTER IV.

A N INTERVIEW.

HE had, at the foot of the steps, been accosted by a newsboy, who called out:

"Telegram, extry, all about the murder," and purchasing one, had thrust it in his pocket.

Once seated in the car, he unfolded it and glancing at the head-lines soon found the item of which he was in search.

"MYSTERIOUS MURDER!"

"A WELL-KNOWN LAWYER STABBED LAST NIGHT!

"Found dying in his office at eleven o'clock to-day!"

"NO CLEW TO THE ASSASSIN."

"This morning, about eleven o'clock, Postman Charles L. Jordan, while on his rounds, having a registered letter for Mr. Curtis Bentley, whose office is, or was, No. 4, Blank Building, rapped on the door and tried the handle, but found the door locked.

"Supposing that Mr. Bently was out, he was about to leave, when his attention was attracted by a gurgling groan, which seemed to proceed from the inside of the room. Looking through the key-hole, he saw a body stretched on the floor, and, thinking something serious had happened, immediately went in search of assistance, soon returning with Policemen Calter and Bright, who broke down the door and entered the office.

"Mr. Bentley was found lying on the floor, the carpet which covered it being soaked with the blood which gushed from a gaping wound in the side. The wounded man was unconscious, and an ambulance being summoned, the patient was taken to the hospital, where the physicians say that he cannot live for more than a few hours.

"There is not the slightest clew to the murderer, and the police are completely at fault. Patrolman Kelley, whose beat extends down Broadway, was sent for, and states that he saw a cab drawn up to the sidewalk, and then drive rapidly off. This was about two A. M., but he was so far away that he was unable to distinguish the person who had evidently stopped and entered the carriage.

"It will be seen, by reference to another column, that a cab-driver was accidentally thrown from his seat and instantly killed, early this morning. It is possible, although scarcely probable, that he may be the same who was seen by Patrolman Kelley.

"The police are searching for the missing driver, and may obtain valuable information later on."

Here the article ended, and as he finished it Colton quietly folded the paper and tossed it on the seat beside him, apparently having no further interest in its contents.

Shortly after the train stopped at the Forty-second street station, and Colton, taking the shuttle train, rode to the Grand Central Depot, and there, calling a cab, ordered the driver to hurry to the Windsor.

Before leaving, however, he had given instructions to Ted to go to the hotel where Jim Jordan was to meet him and there remain until he learned what room he secured, and then, leaving the sachel, to come to the Windsor to meet him.

On arriving at his destination, Colton, bidding the driver await him, entered the hotel, and, going to the office, inquired if Mr. Barton had yet left the city.

"Not yet, sir; he goes this evening. Do you wish to send up a card?"

"If you please," and taking a case from his pocket, he drew from it a handsomely engraved card, bearing the name:

"MR. EDWARD WORTHINGTON,"

which he handed to the clerk, who in turn gave it to a bell-boy, who hurried off with the bit of pasteboard in his hand.

In a few minutes the messenger returned, and approaching Colton, requested him to walk upstairs.

Declining the use of the elevator, Colton followed his guide to the first floor, where, at the end of the hall, and overlooking Fifth avenue, Barton had taken up his abode.

In answer to a knock, a voice called out:

"Come in!" and, turning the knob, the visitor entered.

The sole occupant of the room, a handsome young fellow of twenty-four or five, advanced to meet him, the card in his hand.

"Mr. Worthington, I suppose."

"Yes, sir. And you, I presume, are Mr. Barton?"

"Yes," returned the other, laughingly; "at least that is what they call me here, but out West my friends all call me Kit. But pray sit down."

"Thank you; I will. I must apologize to you for calling, perfect stranger that I am, but—"

"Offer no excuses, sir, I beg you. If I can be of any assistance, pray command me."

"You are about to return to the West?"

"I leave this evening, at six."

"You go by the Pennsylvania route, I suppose, or do you take another line?"

"The Pennsylvania, as I must stop in Chicago for a day or two."

"It was regarding this western trip that I wished to see you."

"I am totally unacquainted with Colorado, and wished to get a few points concerning the locality of a certain town called—let me see, what is that place? The—The Gulch, ah, yes, that is it."

"That is precisely my destination."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, sir."

"In the neighborhood of The Gulch are located all of my interests in the State."

"Well, well! I am more fortunate than I had hoped to be."

"Do you contemplate going there?"

"I had intended starting for the place tomorrow night."

"Advance your journey twenty-four hours, and if you do not mind delaying a short time in Chicago, we can make the trip together."

"You are more than kind, and I will gladly do as you suggest. I am thinking of purchasing certain property out there and am anxious to inspect it before closing. Do you know the 'Faithful' mine?"

"Very well, and if you have an opportunity to purchase it, and the price is not too high, you could not do better than to visit it, when you will certainly be satisfied and will undoubtedly close. I once knew the man who owned it," and here the speaker's brow darkened, "but I did not know it was for sale."

"A Mr. Colton, I suppose you mean, at least that was the name given me by parties downtown. They told me he had gone abroad to remain indefinitely, and wished to dispose of all his American interests."

"In that case I understand. Then," as the other rose, "I will see you this evening?"

"On the six o'clock train from Jersey City Pennsylvania depot."

"Exactly."

The two shook hands, Barton entirely unconscious of the other's identity, and Colton left, chuckling over the success of his first move in this great game of life and fortune.

CHAPTER V.

A TRAP.

A QUARTETTE of persons were seated, two days after the occurrences mentioned above, in the restaurant of one of Chicago's leading hotels, chatting gayly.

It was getting dark and the lights glistened overhead and on all sides of the elegantly decorated dining-room, being reflected in varying tints and hues a thousand-fold in the cut-glass of the crystal chandeliers.

The party consisted of Kit Barton and his wife, Mr. Edward Worthington, who would have been recognized, had his disguise been removed, as Craig Colton, and a sleek, smooth-faced gentleman, who had become known to the two former, as the Rev. Mr. Elkhart.

Although but acquaintances of a little more

than forty-eight hours, Barton and his wife had become quite intimate with their new companions, for Mr. Worthington had introduced himself as an old friend of Mrs. Barton's father, and had shown himself so familiar with that gentleman's history that not a shadow of suspicion entered the minds of the young husband and wife that he was not exactly what he professed to be.

So that when he had introduced to them the reverend gentleman whom he had encountered on the train, as an acquaintance of several years' standing, they considered the latter fact sufficient proof of the minister's identity and welcomed him at once.

And it would have been almost impossible to recognize in the present portly gentleman of the cloth, the quondam proprietor of the "Fresh Clam," situated on the banks of the Harlem, Jim Jordan, Esq.

In changing his clothes and personal appearance, he had changed his manner and his language, and was now as silky and as courtly and elegant in his deportment, as he was choice in his language.

The burden of the conversation was supported by the three men, for Mrs. Barton seemed somewhat indisposed and looked pale and worn out.

"You do not seem well, my sweet pard," said her husband, caressingly.

"What is the matter, you have scarcely eaten a mouthful."

"A severe headache, Kit, arising I suppose from the fatigue of the journey.

"I am afraid that I shall have to ask you to excuse me.

"I think that I would be much better soon, if I could lie down."

"Certainly, my dear madam, certainly!" broke in the Reverend Elkhart.

"While we deplore the cause we regret the necessity of your enforced departure.

"Mr. Worthington, I am sure, will join me in my sympathy."

"Most assuredly; but no doubt you will feel completely restored in the morning, after a quiet rest."

And with a kind "good-evening," Mrs. Barton left the room, accompanied by her husband, who promised to rejoin his guests as soon as he had escorted Mrs. Barton to her room, and seen her comfortably fixed for the night and provided with whatever she might be in want of.

The two plotters, thus left together, did not for an instant forget themselves, as the dining-room was crowded and their remarks would surely have been overheard, but conversed on indifferent subjects until Barton returned, which was in a very short time.

"We hope, Mr. Barton," said Mr. Elkhart, "that your wife's indisposition may prove neither severe nor lasting."

"Thank you; I've no doubt that she will feel completely well in the morning."

"Rejoiced to hear it, I am sure."

"And now, gentlemen, what are your plans for the evening?" inquired Barton, when they had finished their dinner and were sipping their coffee.

"Mr. Elkhart, he tells me, goes to Milwaukee this evening," broke in Worthington, quickly, before the reverend gentleman could reply.

"I, however, have nothing particular to do after seven o'clock, and will then be at your commands to go wherever you wish."

"I think that I should like to go out for a short time, and, if you can suggest anything, I will agree to it."

"I have a friend here," continued Worthington, "who lately returned from Europe, bringing with him a number of fine paintings and pieces of statuary.

"His gallery is not yet open to the public, but I know he would allow us a private view.

"Suppose that I go up there and see him, and return in an hour for you?"

"Excellent! I should be delighted to have this opportunity, and will remain in the writing-room until you get back."

And the trio separated, Barton going to the reading-room, while Worthington and the minister went out together.

They re-entered the hotel immediately afterward by the main entrance, and went up to their rooms, which adjoined each other, and locking the door of Colton's apartment and closing the transom, engaged in a long and earnest conversation.

Again they went out and separated, and were not seen at the hotel until late at night.

Barton continued writing, having on hand several letters that demanded his immediate attention, glancing at his watch from time to time

until the hour of seven approached, when he finished, and turning, awaited the arrival of Worthington.

Just then one of the hall-boys came in and handed him a card, bearing Worthington's name, and having scribbled on the back of it a few words which read thus:

"My friend will be delighted to see you. I forgot an important visit in this neighborhood, and now go to make it, but will be back by the time you arrive. My carriage will bring you here."

Putting on his overcoat, Barton, or Kit, as he was more familiarly called, walked outside, where a coupe was standing, and asked the driver if Mr. Worthington had sent him.

Having received an affirmative answer, he stepped into the carriage and slammed the door, when the horse was driven off at full speed.

The vehicle rolled on leisurely for some time, when suddenly there came a report as if a gigantic fire-cracker had been exploded under the horse's hoof, and instantly the animal dashed off at full speed.

The vehicle swayed and rocked, while Kit tried in vain to open the door, when all at once he heard a loud shout, a crash, and then, being thrown violently forward, he felt that the cab was falling, falling to an unknown depth.

CHAPTER VI.

WESTWARD HO!

WHAT had happened?

Simply that this was the first effort of the two plotters, Craig Colton and Jim Jordan, to rid themselves of Kit Barton.

The former had been the means of causing the horse to run away, the latter had been the driver who had changed his disguise and driven to an open draw-bridge, leaping from his seat just before the horse took the fatal plunge into the Chicago river.

Jordan alighted unhurt and immediately ran to a buggy that was standing near by, in which Colton was seated and was driven off at full speed.

Hastily removing his coat and hat, he made a bundle of them, in which he placed a heavy weight provided for this emergency, put on the overcoat and silk hat that Colton had brought, and once more appeared as the Reverend Mr. Elkhart.

Slacking the speed of his horse as he turned the nearest corner, Colton then drove to the nearest bridge and, after looking about to see that no one was near, Jordan dropped the bundle into the river, where it sunk out of sight.

Having reached the other side, they drove about for a time and then returned to the stable where the buggy had been procured, paid the bill and then sought a quiet reading-room, where they remained until nearly eleven o'clock.

Then returning to their hotel, Colton inquired if Mr. Barton had returned, to which the clerk replied that, as his key was not there, he had probably retired.

So they also sought their rooms, and, going to bed, slept as quietly as if their consciences were as free from guilt as an infant's.

It was nine o'clock the next morning when they descended to the breakfast-room, and walking to the table that had been reserved for them, were almost stricken speechless on seeing Kit and Dainty quietly seated there, conversing calmly, and apparently enjoying their morning meal to the utmost, and as unconcerned as if nothing untoward had happened to disturb them.

But quickly nerving themselves, they took their seats, when Colton, after greeting the two, turned to Kit, with deep concern expressed in every feature of his countenance, and said:

"Your not coming, last evening, caused me to fear that Mrs. Barton had become seriously ill?

"And what is more remarkable, my coachman did not return to give me any information as to your whereabouts.

"I waited until after ten, and found, on entering the hotel, that you had retired.

"I trust that you are entirely recovered, Mrs. Barton," bowing to the lady.

"Entirely, thank you.

"Kit here, though, had a much more serious experience than I, last evening.

"Tell them, Kit, what a narrow escape you had."

And amid many ejaculations of surprise, horror and congratulation, Kit related his experience, telling them what we already know, and continuing:

"When I heard the crash, and felt that I was falling to an unknown depth, I was, for an instant, perfectly dazed, and unable to collect my thoughts.

"But men think quickly in emergencies, and I immediately realized what had happened, having learned through the papers that accidents on account of open draw-bridges are by no means uncommon in this city.

"It did not take the thousandth part of a second for all this to flash through my brain, and without an instant's hesitation I dashed the glass from the window and threw myself out head-first.

"The cab and I struck the water at the same time, and it is a fortunate thing that the river was only covered with a slight film of ice, for, had it been frozen hard, I would undoubtedly have been dashed to pieces.

"It was an easy matter to swim alongside a vessel lying near, and a sailor who had seen the accident, having cracked me a rope, I was soon on board, and was not long in reaching the hotel.

"I was, of course, thoroughly chilled, but soon recovered from that, and feel no ill effects from my involuntary bath this morning.

"But it was a narrow escape, and I fear that the driver was drowned."

"A narrow escape, indeed, and we congratulate you heartily."

"But I thought you intended going to Milwaukee, Mr. Elkhart?"

"That was my intention, but a telegram received, just after I left you, has altered my plans, and, as I have a few weeks at my disposal, I am almost tempted to accept Mr. Worthington's proposition, and take a trip to Colorado.

"The scenery there must be glorious in winter, and I am informed that the climate is wonderful."

The conversation then drifted away from the subject of Kit's adventure and turned upon the wonders of the Centennial State, until the meal was finished, when they separated, promising to meet at dinner, the hour being fixed at four.

When they were once more in Worthington's room, the latter said to Jordan:

"Our very neat little scheme has failed, and we stand just where we were before.

"Barton has not the slightest suspicion, I am sure, that we were the authors and actors last evening, and we seem to have won his entire confidence.

"My counsel is that we allow matters to remain as they are until we reach The Gulch, when we certainly will have ample opportunity to carry out our plans.

"And it is just as well that our attempt failed, for we may be able to locate the mine by Kit's movements.

"If we fail, we must use our utmost endeavors to obtain possession of some very important documents that I am sure Kit or his wife now have in their keeping."

"Just as you say, Cap.

"You suggest and I'll help you carry out the schemes.

"We will leave to-night?"

"There seems to be no doubt of that.

"I am going out to get the tickets and sleeping-car accommodations, and you had better remain here until I return that I may be able to find you, should I wish to consult with you."

After a pleasant dinner, the quartette took carriages and were driven to the depot, taking the train, and jogging along without incident until Denver was reached, whence the stage whirled them to The Gulch.

No snow of any consequence had as yet fallen, so that they made the journey without delay, and once arrived, were comfortably installed in the hotel.

And Faro Frank and Diamond Dan and Charley nearly shook Kit's hand off, while Old Pete, the woolly-headed attendant of The Broadway, bobbed and grinned until his neck and jaws fairly creaked, now and then retiring to the kitchen and executing a scientific double-shuffle in the exuberance of his joy.

CHAPTER VII.

A DISAPPEARANCE.

NOTHING of any importance happened for a week or two, Worthington meantime visiting the mine he contemplated purchasing, and receiving assurances on all sides that it was well worth the price asked and that he could not fail to be amply repaid should he become the owner of it.

And about this time the Reverend Mr. Elkhart, who had been much interested in all that he had seen, but who lamented the absence of a church, in which he could preach to the decidedly hard lot of characters who had located in and about The Gulch, received a letter, calling him East, and bidding his friends good-by took

the next stage for Denver, and was seen no more in that locality.

A night or two after, Kit, bidding Dainty, his wife and Pard, good by, for a short time, and requesting her to remain in her room until he returned, walked to Faro Frank's and asked Pete to saddle his horse.

Frank had taken charge of the horses that Kit had left on going East, and under Pete's care they were in excellent condition.

Mounting, Kit trotted off up the road and arriving at a point where a gully scarred one of the steep bluffs on the side, sprung to the ground, and began to scramble up the ravine.

He disappeared in the matted mass of bushes and did not notice that he was closely followed by a short thickset man, dressed in the garb of a miner, who stole so silently after him that not the slightest rustle betrayed his presence.

Crawling between two logs that lay side by side, Kit disappeared, while the spy who was tracking him, seated himself, and quietly awaited his reappearance.

An hour rolled by, when Kit again reappeared, and, having drawn a pile of brush over the end of the opening through which he had crawled, descended the gully, and in a few moments the hoof-beats of his horse sounded on the road, and gradually died away in the distance.

Then the spy arose, and walked boldly forward, throwing the light from a dark lantern he carried on the pile of brush and sought to move it from its place.

But try as he would, the mass would not stir an inch, so getting down on hands and knees, he set systematically to work to try and discover its secret.

He grasped and pulled and pushed ever branch in turn, until he became almost discouraged, when suddenly his light flashed on a branch which seemed somewhat smoother and more worn than the others.

The wood and bark looked as if they had been handled more than once, so, grasping the bough loosely, he slid his hand along it until he encountered an obstruction underneath.

Here was a catch, cunningly contrived, which held the branch immovably in position, and pressing on it, he released the snap, and, pushing again, was rewarded by seeing the whole mass turn silently to one side, exposing an opening between the two logs.

Into this he crept, being compelled to lie flat on the ground and slowly drag himself forward.

He had not proceeded far when he saw, by the light of his lantern, a trap-door, level with the earth, by the side of which hung a rope, tautened as if holding a heavy weight.

Seating himself on the platform, he pulled upward on the rope, when the trap began to descend and in a short time he had reached the bottom of the shaft.

But as he stepped to the ground, he neglected to hold the trap, and it having no weight to counterbalance that attached to the rope, it flew up with incredible swiftness, while the sudden jerk broke the cord, and it fell at his feet, while the platform, jammed tight, stuck fast and remained in its place, high overhead.

He was entombed alive!

Realizing that the best thing he could do for the present was to continue his explorations, he continued on through the passage until he came to a huge cavern, which was a veritable Aladdin's cave.

Gold glinted on every side and high overhead, lying on the floor in nuggets and shining with a yellow glow from every nook and corner.

There were millions in sight and other millions doubtless awaited the stroke of the pick.

For a few moments the man stood bewildered, and then muttered:

"If the captain and I could get hold of all this, we could afford to let the other go to grass."

"No wonder Mr. Kit can fling money about so reckless like."

And turning his lamp in every direction, he examined the cavern thoroughly, gloating over the treasures it contained.

At length his attention was attracted by a huge chest that stood in the corner, and approaching it, he endeavored to raise the lid, but without success, as it was firmly held down by a half-dozen locks.

Braced and strapped by a network of iron bars, it was almost as strong as a bank-vault, and would have resisted the attacks of a score of men for hours.

Having assured himself of this fact, he began to think of getting out of this subterranean treasure-house, and, returning to the shaft, he endeavored to think of some means by which he could escape.

But the sides were of smoothly-cut rock, and

even could he reach the top, the trap, firmly fastened, would bar his further progress.

"A cat couldn't climb up there, nor a bird fly out," he growled, "and it begins to look as if I had gotten myself into a scrape."

"The captain could never find me and my only hope is that Kit will return soon and get on the trap and fall, thus breaking his neck."

"If the platform was not in the way, I might manage to climb out."

"I guess I'd better take a snooze and wait until something turns up."

"And I'll put the light out to save the oil, although these lamps will supply me for some little time."

And throwing himself on the dry sand that strewed the floor, the spy was soon sound asleep.

In the mean time Kit had galloped to The Broadway, left his horse, and returned to the hotel, immediately going to the room where he had left Dainty.

But she was not there, while the lamp on the table cast its light on a piece of paper lying on the floor, which he picked up, and glanced at with staring eyes and beating heart.

CHAPTER VIII.

A STRANGE ENCOUNTER.

WHEN the sleeping man awoke, he had no idea of the time, for the cavern was as dark as a dungeon, and before he lighted his lantern he could not see a thing.

He had noticed that there were several lamps hung about the place, so did not worry about his light, but he began to feel both hungry and thirsty and was seriously alarmed about the scrape he had gotten into.

He looked in every nook and cranny of the rocky walls, without result, and was about to give up the search when, in a far corner, in a niche of the rock, his foot struck something hard that was covered by the sand.

Clearing the covering away, he found an iron ring, which was fastened to the center of a square slab of stone, and pulling on it he easily raised it, disclosing to view a small cavity hewn out of the solid rock.

And in this, fitting almost exactly, was a wooden box, which, on being opened, he found to contain an ample store of edibles and a half a dozen bottles of water.

"Good enough!" he ejaculated. "I can't starve or die of thirst, at any rate, for some days. Now for a meal. I only wish I had a few oysters and a dozen bottles of beer from the 'Fresh Clam' to finish off with. Looks a little like I might never see that place again, though."

But the former proprietor of the "Fresh Clam" seemed inclined to take a philosophical view of the situation, and seating himself against the wall satisfied his hunger.

He had left The Gulch as the Reverend Mr. Elkhart, and returned the following day as Jim Jordan, having put on a heavy black beard and wig, and dressed himself in the garb of a miner.

After eating somewhat sparingly, for he wished to make his rations last as long as possible, not knowing how many days his imprisonment might last, he arose and walked to the provision case to replace in it the remnants of what he had; but, as he reached the hole, his lantern, insecurely placed, fell over on its side, and in an instant was extinguished, leaving him in total darkness.

As he realized that he had best not move for an instant, his foot, which was just at the edge of the hole in the floor, slipped into it, and he trying to catch himself, plunged headlong forward against the wall, his head striking it with terrific force.

His heavy felt hat protected him from any serious injury, but, as he crashed against the rock, the whole wall crumbled and fell away, and he pitched forward and downward with a cry of despair.

But he only dropped a few feet and splashed into a swiftly-flowing current of icy-cold water, and was swept away, clutching in every direction, with no result, however, except that of tearing his fingers until they bled.

He was hurried on, gasping and struggling, until he collected his senses and struck out boldly; and being a fine swimmer, was able to keep himself afloat without any difficulty.

And as he swam on down this black stream, he caught a glimpse of a ray of light, which rapidly drew nearer, until he could see that it was the opening through which the stream plunged, and heard the roar of the cataract where the water leaped from the face of the cliff.

He was powerless to stay his impetuous

course, and as he approached the opening he closed his eyes with a shudder that did not arise altogether from cold.

And an instant later he was shot far out into the air, balanced a moment, and then fell, full twenty feet, into the pool hollowed out by the force of the water in the rocks below.

In the whirling of the waters he spun about a few moments, and then was carried out and down the stream, when, raising himself, he managed to grasp an overhanging branch and drew himself to shore.

Half-fainting and exhausted, he fell on the bank and laid there for some time, until he was somewhat restored, when he arose and looked about him.

High on both sides towered the cliffs, to the height of six or seven hundred feet, while the ends were blocked by precipices that were equally lofty.

And recognizing the place, he saw that he was imprisoned in a canyon from which there was absolutely no escape, and which was inaccessible from above, save by the dangerous route which had brought him thither, and to traverse which was almost certain and sudden death.

And now indeed he gave up all hope, for his condition was doubly worse than that of a short time before.

The sun was shining in a clear sky, for his sleep in the cavern had been long and sound.

Walking through the thick growth of timber that covered the bottom of the canyon, he suddenly came upon a little clearing, an acre in extent, about which the trees stood almost as regularly as if they had been planted in order.

And as he stepped out into the opening, he started with a yell of terror, and would have fled, but that his feet seemed glued to the ground and he could not move.

For against every tree leaned a human skeleton, and as there were at least fifty trees, so there were fifty of the grinning, fleshless skulls—fifty white and bleached remains of what had once been living beings.

But gradually his terror grew less, and he obtained control over his nerves, and advanced into the clearing, in the center of which stood a small cabin.

The door of the house was closed, but on lifting the latch he found that he could enter, so, stepping in, he looked about him, and then leaped back, for, as his foot pressed the threshold, a man, standing directly opposite the door, raised his gun to his shoulder, and aimed directly at the intruder.

Covered as he was by the log walls of the cabin, he began to parley.

"Stranger, I'm dyin' with cold, an' want ter come in an' get warm. I ain't after no harm, so put down yer shootin'-irons and be friendly."

Receiving no answer, he cautiously peeped in, and saw that the occupant of the room had lowered his weapon, but was still standing in the same place.

For a moment he hesitated, and then, nerving himself for the leap, he sprung through the door, rushed on the other and seized him before he could raise his rifle, when they both stumbled and fell to the floor.

CHAPTER IX.

A FORGED NOTE.

FOR a moment Kit stood as if frozen into immobility, and could not have moved, and the written words seemed like flames of fire dancing before his eyes.

The words were these:

"DAINTY:—

"My horse stumbled, and threw me heavily a short time ago, and I am unable to move. Come to me at once.

KIT."

The writing was his, the signature was his, and had the note been one he could have written, he would have sworn to the writing and the signature.

But it was a forgery, and the note had evidently been sent to her for the purpose of leading her into a trap.

With an oath which was surely not recorded against him on high, he dashed from the room, and hurried down-stairs, bursting into the office like a tornado.

"At what time did that note arrive for my wife?" he demanded of the landlord, who trembled like a leaf.

"I—I can't say, sir."

"Did you not see the messenger arrive?"

"N-no, sir."

"But you surely saw my wife go out?"

"I thought she was up-stairs, sir."

"And what reason had you to suppose that?"

JNA

"Why, you told me yourself, sir, not fifteen minutes ago, that she was asleep, when I asked you if she wished anything."

"I told you! You asked me!"

"Why, yes, sir; not a quarter of an hour ago, when you looked in."

"Either you are mad, or I am dreaming. I have just this moment returned, having been absent over an hour and a half."

"And I'll swear that I spoke to you, not twenty minutes ago, as you stood in the door. You had on the same suit you used to wear the last time you were here, the velvet one."

Like lightning the explanation flashed upon Kit, as he remembered that Dainty, just before he left, had unpacked the suit he had once given her, and in which she resembled him so exactly that it was impossible to tell them apart.

No doubt the girl had put it on, merely for amusement, and was thus dressed when the message had arrived, and thus decked had left the house, saying a word to the hotel-keeper as she passed, that he might not go to the room during her absence.

Without another word, he turned from the landlord, and bounded up-stairs, three steps at a time, and, entering his room, began to change his clothes as rapidly as he could, dressing himself in the velvet suit which had formerly made him so conspicuous.

Completely dressed, and with his wide hat on his head, and his gold spurs glistening in the lamplight, he again descended the stairs, and leaving the house without being observed, he hurried to The Broadway, where all the games were in full blast, in search of Worthington, whom he had not seen for some time.

The old gentleman, he knew, was very fond of a little game of poker, and being a pretty stiff player, held his own very successfully against the strong game that was nightly in session in Faro Frank's.

Charley was sitting in one corner, reading the latest newspaper that had arrived and entirely unconscious of the noise and confusion about him.

To Kit's hurried inquiry regarding Worthington, he replied that he had seen nothing of that gentleman since about seven that evening, when he had come in and remained a short time, and then, having been in the back room, and coming out, hearing Pete say that Kit had taken his horse and ridden away, he had expressed disappointment at not having seen him, and left the room.

"But what is the matter, Kit, my boy? You look as pale as a ghost."

And Charley, rising, looked at his friend anxiously.

"Oh, nothing at all—a little tired perhaps, up late last night. I wish you would take Frank's place at the table for a few minutes, I want to see him particularly."

"Certainly, always ready to do anything in the world for you."

And relieving Frank, Charley continued the deal while Kit and Frank went into the private room, which was fortunately unoccupied, and closed the door carefully.

When Kit had confided to his friend what had happened, he pulled the note, that had caused all the trouble, from his pocket and handed it to Frank.

"Why, Kit," the latter cried, as he glanced at it, "this is your writing!"

"It is and it is not."

"How do you mean?"

"Why, that it is enough like mine to be my writing, yet I never wrote it."

"It is a forgery."

"And a magnificent one at that," cried Faro Frank, admiringly.

"The man who wrote that could cause decided trouble in a city among the banks."

"But that is not the question."

"How do you explain this matter?"

"That is just what is driving me mad!"

"Which way to turn I know not, whether north, south, east or west."

"I only know one thing and that is that this is nothing but a vile plot aimed at our happiness and perhaps at Dainty's life."

"But I will search the four quarters of the earth for her, and woe betide those who have abducted her even though not a single hair of her head has been harmed!"

"And I'm with you, Kit!"

"I know it well, Frank, but I shall, at first, endeavor to learn her whereabouts alone."

"I only want you, in case I do not turn up, to be ready to come to my assistance, if I can get word to you where I am."

"Nothing can be done to-night, so I will re-

main here until daylight, with your permission, and then start out."

"Let no one come in, please, as they all think at the hotel that I am in my room, for I locked the door, and came out without being noticed."

"Should those who have led Dainty into this plot become aware that I am out and probably in search of them, it would put them on their guard."

"All right."

"You shall not be disturbed, and I'll tell that nigger, Pete, to have your horse ready for you at the first streak of dawn."

"Thank you, Frank."

"And, remember, should I need assistance, I would rather count on you, Charley and Dan than on any one in the State!"

"And you would not be disappointed, and in answering for myself, I know that I am answering for them!"

And leaving the room, Frank closed the door, which Kit locked, and then sat down to wait impatiently for daylight.

CHAPTER X.

THE WEIRD CANYON.

As Jordan and the unknown rolled over on the floor, the rifle held by the latter was discharged, when suddenly Jim rose to his feet with an expression of disgust and looked down at his late antagonist somewhat as though he was ashamed of himself.

For he had been wrestling with a dummy!

So admirably had the figure been constructed, however, that at first glance any one could have been mistaken.

Carefully stuffed with dried grass, the suit of clothes in which the figure was dressed seemed to fit it perfectly, and on closer inspection Jordan saw that the face was composed of a wax mask and that the arms and legs were held in place by bent branches of trees that admirably counterfeited the man they were intended to represent.

The figure had been placed in position exactly opposite the door, and, as Jordan shortly discovered, had been securely fastened to the floor.

A system of wires, running to the arms to a point near the door, was so arranged that any one stepping on the top step outside, would cause the arms to raise the rifle held by the dummy to a level with its eye.

And if the person who entered should step inside, a second loose plank would discharge the weapon, and the ball would almost surely strike the intruder in the chest.

The whole arrangement was decidedly ingenious, and the former occupant of the cabin had evidently prepared the figure so as to give a warm welcome to any one who might visit it in his absence.

Leaving the guardian of the place lying on the floor, Jordan hunted about, and finding an abundant supply of matches on a shelf, and a store of dry wood in a closet at one side, soon had a blazing fire roaring in the huge chimney.

In one corner of the solitary room which composed the cabin, stood a cot, with a half a dozen blankets spread over it, and the whole place looked as if the owner had not been absent an hour.

But Jordan cared little for that, and did not bother himself a moment with the thought that the proprietor of the place might return at any minute, and find him in possession.

Taking off his clothes, which were wringing wet, he hung them before the fire, where they steamed away, and, wrapping himself in a blanket, seated himself on a stool and began to examine his quarters.

There was not a single window in the place, but the sun was shining so brightly outside that everything was distinctly visible by the light which streamed in through the open door.

He saw that the latter could be fastened by a heavy iron bar, which fitted in sockets on either side, that were shod with iron, and the door itself, being massively constructed, could bid defiance to almost any blows that could be showered on it.

The next thing that attracted his attention was a half a dozen iron levers, resting in crotches against the wall, the use of which he could not imagine, so walking over to them, he pulled on one, and it yielding readily, he pushed it back and forth a number of times.

But he could not see that any effect was produced by this action, until he happened to glance out of the open door, when he saw that with each motion of the lever, all of the skeletons in sight raised their right hands above their heads, and then, as the lever was pushed back, lowered them to their sides.

The next lever had the same effect on their

left arms, while the third caused them to advance the right foot as if about to step forward.

Trying the fourth, he found that on moving it the left foot of the skeleton advanced, while the fifth caused them to nod their skulls gravely.

But on moving the fifth, such an unearthly noise broke out on the air, sounding like a thousand screeches and yells, that he dropped the bar in terror and stood there trembling.

Soon recovering from his fright, he examined further, and found that all of the levers could be moved at once by attaching an iron bar to their ends, and trying the effect, and pushing and pulling rapidly, the result was awful.

For all of the skeletons he could see, and doubtless the others, seemed to be dancing and throwing their arms about, and nodding their heads, while their fleshless jaws opened and shut and at the same time the horrible screeches and yelling sounded out, as if Pandemonium had broken loose and was holding its revels in the glade.

When he had worked the mechanism to his satisfaction, Jordan, his clothes now being perfectly dry, dressed himself and continued his explorations, which resulted in his finding a cupboard filled with all manner of food, from a barrel nearly full of flour to an abundance of canned goods.

A square trap in the middle of the floor, on being raised, disclosed a cistern, which was full of water, being supplied, evidently, by a trench leading from the creek.

A ladder, nailed against the wall, led to the roof, where was a square tower, built of heavy logs, pierced with loop-holes, and containing a perfect arsenal of weapons.

Here the occupant of the cabin could station himself, and defend his house without the slightest danger, his elevated position enabling him to command the surrounding glade, while the solid walls of the tower would protect him perfectly.

A knob set in the floor and projecting above it an inch or two, was a prominent feature of the cupola, and curious to see what it was intended for, Jordan placed his foot on it and pressed heavily.

In an instant a bright blue flame shot from each of the fifty trees, from just above the skulls of the skeletons, and, although it was now broad daylight, the effect when darkness should have come on could readily be imagined, being doubtless weird in the extreme and well calculated to chill the stoutest heart.

From this point also could be worked the system of levers below, so that from above the skeletons could be set to dancing and nodding and tossing their arms about, while the pale blue light could be made to cast its weird glow over all.

Should any one be caught there at night, and the awful spectacle burst out on them, they would either be driven insane or would flee from the spot, never to return.

But how could the occupant of the place leave the canyon?

That was another mystery, and Jordan set about solving it.

CHAPTER XI.

TRAPPED.

WHEN Kit had left his wife pard, while he proceeded to his "den," to replenish his somewhat depleted pocketbook, she had just unpacked from a chest left at The Gulch when they went East, the velvet suit she had worn.

For pastime she had dressed herself from tip to toe in the striking costume, drawing on the boots and placing her hat jauntily on the side of her head, and was smiling at herself in the glass when there came a sudden tap on the door.

Not wishing that any one should see her thus attired, she opened the door only an inch or so when a hand was thrust in and a voice outside said:

"A note for Mrs. Barton."

"Very important and to be read at once."

"I will wait for the answer."

Sick at heart, and trembling with an unknown dread, Dainty tore open the note and read the words that Kit had found a short time after.

For a moment she felt weak and faint and her hand dropped to her side and the paper fluttering unnoticed to the floor.

But in a few seconds she again became the brave girl who had been Kit's companion in so many scenes of danger and death.

Not stopping to change her dress, she slipped on her riding habit, or rather the skirt, and wrapping a huge cloak about her, opened the door and looked out.

Standing and waiting patiently, was a man whom she had never seen before, to the best of her recollection, dressed in the garb of a miner with rough beard and long, black hair, who saluted her awkwardly, and awaited what she might have to say.

"You came from my husband?"

"Yes, marm."

"Where is he?"

"Bout five miles from here, near the 'Faithful.'"

"Is he badly hurt?"

"Not much, but I reckon his leg is broke."

"Then let us hasten to him."

"Go to the stable, please, and get my horse."

"I will speak to the landlord."

And as the man disappeared in the darkness Dainty went to the office, and, dropping her cloak on the floor, put her head and shoulders inside and spoke to the landlord.

The latter evidently thought that it was Kit who was talking to him, as was proven shortly afterward by his conversation with Dainty's husband.

Closing the door, and again wrapping her cloak about her, the girl stepped outside and joined the messenger, who was waiting for her, holding the two horses.

And mounting, they rode away as rapidly as the darkness would admit in the direction of Dainty's former home.

Passing the ruins of the cabin, they kept on for some distance, when they struck the path that led to Colton's house, when a thought flashed through Dainty's mind and she stopped her horse suddenly.

She had recollect that Kit had told her that he was going to his den, and its location having been described to her by her husband, she remembered that to reach it he must have ridden west instead of east, in which direction she had been riding.

As she stopped, the man who was riding beside her also reined in his horse, and awaited whatever she might have to say.

"You say that my husband is at the 'Faithful' mine?"

"Eggzactly!"

"And how came he there?"

"He rid thar."

"And how does it happen that he came here at this hour of the night?"

"Thet's his bizness; how do I know w'at he wanted."

And the man spoke gruffly and seemed decidedly uneasy under this continued flow of questions.

"How came you to be in the neighborhood and how did this accident happen?"

"I'm a-watchin' ther mine fur Cap'n Colton, an' as Mr. Barton cum ridin' up, his critter stepped onto a loose stone an' fell on him before Kit could get outen ther way."

"Was he alone?"

"All alone, mum."

"My friend," returned Dainty, quietly, "I believe that you are falsifying."

"Cum up an' see for yourself; it's only a bit away now."

But on account of the manner of her guide, on account of the knowledge that there was absolutely no reason why Kit should have come in this direction, when he had told her that his errand lay in a contrary one, Dainty's suspicions were now fully aroused.

Determined, however, to put the matter to its fullest test, she loosened the skirt of her riding habit from about her waist and allowed it to slip to the ground, tossed off the huge cloak she wore, and swinging her foot over the saddle, sat squarely erect and turning, faced the man.

She was the perfect picture of Kit, as all the dwellers thereabouts knew him, and nothing was wanting in her costume to complete the resemblance.

The velvet coat, with its shining buttons, the frilled shirt, with priceless diamond, the broad hat with gold band; knee-breeches, patent-leather boots, with gold spurs, the sachet hung at the side, all were complete, and the man, uttering a cry of astonishment, drew back his horse and gazed in amazement as the rising moon flooded her face.

"A very pritty little plot to lead my wife into a trap, but a failure as you see."

"And now, you sneak, tell me what this all means, or—!"

And with an action that spoke louder than words the speaker put hand to belt to draw a weapon and extort a confession.

But she had no belt on, and was entirely unarmed!

For she had just been about to put the belt around her waist when the knock had sounded

on the door, and in her excitement had forgotten it.

At her motion the man, who was eying her closely, quailed visibly, but seeing that she wore no belt, recovered his nerve, and rode toward her.

But like a flash Dainty turned her horse and galloped furiously down the path to the main road, and then, turning to the right, fairly flew in the direction of The Gulch, where she knew she could find protection from Faro Frank.

But well as she was mounted, her pursuer had the better horse, and just as they reached the forks of the road, he galloped alongside of her and leaning forward, grasped the bridle of her horse.

And emphasizing his remarks by pressing the muzzle of a pistol to her temple, he said:

"Come, my young friend, the jig is up, and you might as well surrender!"

CHAPTER XII.

A HITCH IN THE SCHEME.

THE minutes passed with snail-like progress, while it seemed to Kit as if the night would never end, and the laggard sun never rise.

But at length a faint streak of gray stole over the East, and in a moment Kit was on his feet and had left the room by the window, closing the latter, which fastened with a spring.

Hurrying to the stable, he there met Pete, who was just coming out, leading his horse, and, thanking the faithful old darky, he leaped into the saddle and rode out in front of the saloon.

Here he stopped and began to think what he had best do, and in which direction he had best commence his search.

"Dainty could not have come in this direction, or I should have met her."

"So she must have ridden the other way."

"The question now is: Did she keep straight on, or did she take the other road at the forks, and so on to the stage-road?"

"That question may best be answered by riding to the forks, where I may obtain a clew."

So, without further hesitation, he turned his horse's head east and set off down the road at full speed.

He was not long in arriving at the forks of the road and there stopped, and dismounting, began to examine the road carefully.

He walked up the main branch for three or four hundred yards, without any result, and found that the road was so dry and so stony that it was doubtful if a horse, ridden or led along there, would leave any trace of his hoofs.

Retracing his steps, he walked back to the forks and in the direction of Dainty's ruined home, when suddenly he leaped forward with an exclamation, and stooping, picked up a small scrap of something from the ground.

This he examined carefully, turning it in every direction, and, although it bore no mark of writing, he seemed perfectly satisfied with his discovery.

Yet it seemed but a trifle, being only the end of a finger, torn from a lavender kid-glove, which had been stained and soiled with something that left a dark-red spot upon it.

And Kit recognized it as a piece torn from a glove he had worn on a night that Dainty's father had been murdered, and which had been soaked with the dead man's blood.

She had kept it as a sacred memento of her only relative on earth, and had promised Kit to send it to him whenever she might be in trouble.

This she had never been compelled to do, but had preserved it; and now it was serving the excellent purpose of affording signs by which Kit could learn the direction she had taken.

Realizing that she must be in trouble, or she never would have thus mutely appealed to him, Kit, leading his horse, walked rapidly along the road, finding, every four or five hundred yards a scrap of the glove, which fact assured him that he was on the right track.

Suddenly he came to the path which branched off to the left and led to the "Faithful" mine and Colton's former home, and here he hesitated an instant.

But only for an instant.

For, twenty yards up the path, a patch of color caught his eye, and walking up to it he found the remnant of the glove lying by the side of the stony path.

Placing it in his pocket, he now felt not the slightest doubt that Dainty had been entrapped into going to Colton's house.

So, leaping astride his horse, he galloped on up the path, entered the valley, and regardless

of danger, dashed up to the door of the stone hut unchallenged.

Throwing himself to the ground, he lifted the latch and tried the door, but it was fastened, and he could not move it.

Stepping back a pace or two, he gave a tremendous bound, struck the door with both feet fairly in the center, and as the building shook from the shock, the hinges gave way, and as Kit fell to the ground, the door flew inward with a crash.

On his feet in an instant, Kit dashed through the open door, and glanced around.

Seated in a chair was Dainty, fast bound, and unable to move; and with a cry of "Kit, my husband!" she tried to rise and stretch out her hands to him, but was so firmly tied that she could not move; so she contented herself with smiling lovingly at him, while her eyes fairly beamed with devotion and pride.

In a second Kit's knife flashed in the air, and the keen edge had severed the bonds which held the girl so cruelly tight, and then they were clasped in each other's arms, Dainty sobbing with joy and breaking into a thousand endearing exclamations.

When she was somewhat quieted, she related to Kit what had happened, telling him how she had thought of the glove, and how, unperceived by her captor, she had succeeded in tearing it into strips and dropping them one by one.

The man who had inveigled her into the snare had offered her no indignity, but was evidently assured of the fact that it was Kit he had captured, and not Dainty, and seemed much vexed at this sudden termination of his plans.

But he had ridden off, telling her that he would soon have company for her in the companionship of her wife, saying also, that he would soon return.

In one corner of the room lay Dainty's riding-skirt and cloak, they having been picked up by her captor as they returned, he evidently fearing that they might furnish a clew to his prisoner's whereabouts.

And as they caught Kit's eye, he grinned as if amused beyond expression, and still holding his wife close to him, he said to her:

"I think I will try a little masquerading myself."

"This unknown man who captured you, has probably returned to The Gulch in search of my wife!"

And Kit laughed outright.

"Your riding-skirt is of such a color as not to be striking, and as he only saw it at night, he probably would not recognize it again."

"I'll put it on, as well as the cloak, and ride to the forks, conceal myself, and when he comes back, will overtake him, and give him a surprise."

"And you, darling, come with me, and when I leave you, to follow this man, ride straight to The Broadway, send Pete for Frank Francis, and ask him to stay about the hotel until I return."

"Tell him what has happened and he will understand, and will see that no harm comes to you while I am away."

"You can depend on that."

So, Dainty's horse being saddled, Kit disguised himself and they rode away, keeping careful watch, lest they might encounter the abductor, Dainty looking like the husband, while Kit was the image of his wife.

CHAPTER XIII.

DOUBLY TRICKED.

THEY had not long been concealed in the thick growth of underbrush, which, although now stripped of its leaves, hid them perfectly, withdrawn as they were, a hundred yards or so from the road, when they heard the beat of a horse's hoofs, coming from the direction of The Gulch.

"That must be our unknown friend," whispered Kit to Dainty.

"I will let him pass, and then, pushing through the brush to the other road, will gallop down to the fork and overtake him."

"You, of course, will remain here, until we are well out of sight and will then hurry to The Broadway and give your message to Frank."

"He will doubtless be there by this time."

"Now, Kit, do be careful!" pleaded Dainty, laying her small hand, gloved with the same sort of covering that had won Kit's name for him, on his arm.

"Don't fear, my child," returned Kit, "I am well armed, and will doubtless have the villain at my mercy before he realizes what has happened. Take good care of yourself!"

And the horseman by this time having passed them, Kit wheeled, and soon reaching the other

road, struck east at a rapid pace, and soon overtook the man riding ahead.

The latter, who had heard him coming and who, turning, had perceived that the new arrival was on the other road from the one he had followed, drew rein, and waited till Kit came up.

And as Kit drew near, he muttered to himself, exultingly:

"The girl is riding straight into the trap."

"And now for a little diplomacy."

As Kit came alongside, the man spoke to him, saying, in as friendly and pleasant tones as he could assume:

"You air out early, Miss Barton."

"Yes; my husband being away, I thought I would take a ride, as the morning was so pleasant."

"Did you just come from The Gulch?"

"Yes, marm."

"And did you see Mr. Barton there?"

"No, marm; but an hour or so ago, I seen him ridin' to'rds the path leading ter ther 'Faithful' mine, an' s'pose he's thar."

"Then I'll ride on and meet him."

"Are you going that way?"

"Yessum. I'm ther watchman thar, sence Capt'n Colton hez stopped workin' it."

"I understand that the mine is to be sold to a Mr. Worthington, soon."

"Thet's w'ot they say."

"And he'll make a good purchase if he buys it, I judge from all accounts."

"Ther's no better mine in ther kentry."

During this conversation they were winding slowly on and had now arrived at the path which led abruptly up the hill to the left.

Here the girl—for Kit appeared to be his wife, so great was their resemblance—stopped, irresolutely, and then, turning her horse toward the path, said:

"I believe I will ride up and see if my husband is at the mine."

"He may have gone there with Mr. Worthington."

"Jest w'ot I war a-goin' ter propose, mum."

"Thar war sum one with him, though I c'u'dn't see eggzactly who it war."

"Then you ride on ahead."

"Your horse certainly knows the way better than mine, and will choose the easiest path; I will follow close after you."

"All right, marm," replied the other, having no suspicion that things were otherwise than they seemed, and not wishing to arouse any by objecting.

And so they rode on into the valley and up to the house, but there was no one in sight far or near.

Before leaving Kit had so fixed the door that it presented no appearance, from the outside of having been torn from its fastenings, and as the man dismounted, he was unaware that a visit had been paid to the dwelling during his absence.

"I fear that I shall not find Mr. Barton here," said Kit, in his most winning tones; "but I will dismount and ask you for a cup of water."

"Sart'in, marm."

"An' maybe," as Kit sprung from the saddle, which he had taken from his pard's horse, and replaced with his own, thus riding in a side-saddle, "ye'll go inside an' rest a bit."

"I think," with a malicious grin, "that mebbe thar's some one in thar as'll be glad ter see you."

"And who is that?" asked Kit, slipping his hands under his cloak.

"Come in an' see."

And placing his hand on the latch, he proceeded to take a key from his pocket, with which to unlock it, keeping an eye on Kit, ready to seize the girl should her suspicions be aroused and she attempt to escape.

But as he inserted the key, the pressure on the door pushed it inward, and it fell to the floor with a bang.

Looking into the room, where the supposed Kit was yet seated and tied firmly, he saw that his prisoner had escaped, and with an exclamation of rage, he turned on the other.

But he looked into the muzzle of a gleaming revolver, held by a tall, slender youth, who had thrown off the cumbersome drapery that enveloped him and now stood, the fac-simile of the prisoner who had escaped.

And then came the stern command:

"Throw up your hands!"

And mechanically he obeyed.

"Who air you?" he stammered, gazing at Kit, in utter astonishment.

"I am Kid-Glove Kit: now who are you?"

"But I left you here tied, not two hours ago."

"That was my wife."

"You have been doubly tricked."

"First you thought you had captured Mrs. Barton, but soon came to the conclusion that it was her husband who was in your power."

"The first impression was the correct one, but she outwitted you completely, and convinced you that she was I."

"Then you thought that she was in this dress and you find me instead."

"Completely outwitted by a woman at first, you are now her husband's prisoner."

"I will not take you to The Gulch, for they would hang you if I told them of your plots."

"But I will leave you here gagged and tied, and trust to luck to find you here when I return to-night."

"I need you, and don't want you to die just yet."

And, still keeping one revolver pointed at the other's head, Kit disarmed and then marched him inside, where he did as he had promised, afterward standing the door in its place and then riding off to The Gulch, where he found Dainty safe and sound, while Faro Frank, seated on the top step of the stairway which led to her hall, declined to allow anybody to pass, not even the landlord.

And as he enforced his remarks with a fierce-looking revolver, every one acquiesced and none insisted.

CHAPTER XIV.

A CONSULTATION.

RELIEVING Frank, and thanking him for his attention, Kit, asking him to await him downstairs, went to his rooms and announced his safe return to his wife, and then, telling her that he wished to talk with Francis, he left the room again.

Rejoining his friend, he went with him to The Broadway, and found everything in full blast, as, indeed, it always was at that hour of the night.

Nodding to several acquaintances, Frank elbowed his way through the crowd, followed by Kit, and led the way to the famous back room, which was always the scene of their various consultations.

Seated here, Kit gave a detailed account of what had happened to him, Dainty having already told him of her experiences.

And having finished, he added:

"Now, Frank, what does this mean?"

"How do you account for these continued attacks upon Dainty and myself?"

"Kit," said Frank, earnestly, "where is Worthington to-night?"

This question seemed so foreign to the matter they were discussing, that Kit did not reply, but stared at Francis in blank amazement.

"You undoubtedly think that I am wandering from the subject; but tell me, where is he to-night?"

"I really cannot say."

"When did you see him last?"

"Yesterday, I think it was."

"Well, now, Kit, you know that we gamblers have to be pretty shrewd sort of men in our business."

"Every man's hand is against us; our hands are against every man's."

"We must watch and suspect, even though there appears to be no actual ground for suspicion."

"I have been watching and suspecting Worthington for several days, and I tell you that it is my firm belief that he is not what he represents himself to be."

"What in the world do you mean?"

"That he is playing some deep game, and is in disguise."

"I thought so the first time I saw him, and now am positive of it."

"And what do you think this means?"

"Taking into consideration the fact that I believe him to be masquerading, and sailing under false colors—

"Taking into consideration the fact that he has not been seen about here for twenty-four hours—

"Taking into consideration the fact that he is perfectly familiar with Craig Colton's possessions here, and the movements of the latter—

"Taking into consideration their plots against your life, both here and in Chicago, I am convinced that he is but a tool of Colton's, and that if you strip your prisoner of his disguise you will find Worthington underneath."

"Frank, you fairly take my breath away."

"Such an idea never entered my brain, and I am not yet convinced that it is as you say."

"What do you think I had best do?"

"Judge for yourself."

"The man has offered both you and your wife indignities to which you will not tamely submit."

"He is in your power."

"Use that power to find out the truth, and if it be as I suspect, you can then make use of any means that may suggest themselves to probe this mystery."

"I am convinced that some secret tie connects this man, Worthington, and Colton."

"Scratch a Russian, and you will find a Tartar."

"Scratch your prisoner and you will find Worthington, and scratch him, and you will find Colton."

"You do not imagine for a moment that Worthington and Colton are one and the same?"

"Not for a moment; you misunderstand me totally."

"What I do mean, though, is that the would-be abductor of your wife and Worthington are one, and that the latter is one of Colton's numerous instruments, and I tell you, my dear fellow, the woods are full of 'em."

"Then—"

"Then I think that if I were you, I would take your friend, the enemy, and put him in some place where he would be safe; after satisfying yourself that he is either Worthington, or is not, I would keep him confined until he weakened and confessed, even if it took years."

"Do you know of any reason why Colton should seek your life?"

"The only possible explanation I can offer is that he, in some manner, came to the conclusion that Dainty's father was the owner of an exceedingly valuable mine of which he thought he could gain possession."

"He killed Mr. Danford and obtained possession of his papers, and evidently thought that if he could get us out of the way that he could, undisputed, lay claim to the property."

"There is something behind all this that I cannot solve, and it is for that reason that I am here."

"If Dainty owns anything on earth I will see that she secures it, although I am rich beyond my wildest dreams."

"And you have no clew to the location of Mr. Danford's property?"

"Not the slightest."

"Well, something will turn up eventually, I have no doubt, and everything will turn out all right."

"But the most important thing now is to attend to your prisoner."

"As I said before, Colton has any number of men in his pay here, and they might happen to drop in and release him."

"Do you know of any place you can take him to?"

"I do, indeed, and one in which he will be as secure as if chained to an anchor a thousand feet deep in the ocean."

"Phe-e-e-w!" whistled Frank, "it must be a daisy."

"But come, we will go and watch the prisoner until late, when this town shall have settled down, that we may not meet any one on the road."

"Do we have to pass through The Gulch to get to your prison?"

"Yes."

"Then we will not come back until toward morning."

And the two friends left the room and walked out into the saloon.

CHAPTER XV.

UNMASKED.

CALLING Charley, who occupied the "look-out" chair, his brother told him that Kit and he were about to leave and would not probably return before morning.

He therefore asked him to go to the hotel, get a book and to seat himself in the hall in front of the door of Dainty's sitting-room, and to allow no one to pass.

To this Charley readily consented, and the three walked to the hotel, where Kit told his wife of Frank's suspicions, and assured her that he ran no danger in putting the matter to a test.

He added that Charley would remain in the hall on watch all night, and until they returned, so that she need feel no uneasiness whatever.

Then, bidding her good-night and having seen Charley comfortably fixed with an easy-chair, a good lamp and a lot of fine cigars, he rejoined Frank, and the two left the house.

Pete was on hand with their horses, Kit mounting a fresh one, and they struck off through the night in the direction of Colton's house, reaching there without any adventure.

Leaving Frank to watch the horses, Kit gave the door a kick and entered the room, where he

found his prisoner safe, but growling like a wounded lion.

He had changed his mind about gagging him, fearing that he might be absent a long time and not wishing to inflict any more punishment yet, than mere imprisonment.

He lighted a lamp that stood on a shelf, and then addressed the man:

"My friend," said he, quietly, "I have decided suspicions that you are not what you pretend to be."

"I am going to release you from those ropes, which are, I suppose, the reverse of comfortable, and then will request you to remove that wig and beard."

"Should you decline, my friend, Mr. Francis, known to you probably better as Faro Frank, who is outside, and I will perform your toilet for you."

"Yes, and pretty quick, too, Mr. Worthington," added Frank.

At the sound of the name, the man shuddered visibly and then, without a word, held out his arms for Kit to untie them.

"You agree, then?"
A sullen nod was the only answer.

"You are wise, for you probably have saved yourself from some rough treatment."

"We are in no mood to be trifled with."

"You bet we ain't!" chimed in the irrepressible Frank.

"And you can play that card to win."

When the ropes had been loosened, the man arose to his feet, chafed his wrists and ankles a moment to restore circulation, and seemed for a moment to be meditating a plan to escape.

But the odds were too great, and he was compelled to give up the unequal contest.

So, turning his back, he worked about his head and chin for a few minutes and finally tossed his black wig and false beard to the floor and then, turning around defiantly, and crossing his arms, revealed the well-known features of—Edward Worthington!!!

Faro Frank, who was peering anxiously through the door, holding the reins in his hand, uttered a yell that would have done no discredit to a Comanche Indian, and would have doubtless favored Kit with his views on the discovery, had not the startled horses, suddenly jerking back, yanked him flat on his face as Kit called out, laughing:

"Shut up, Frank, you'll raise the whole country and have Colton's gang down on us in a jiffy."

Then addressing Worthington he said, sternly:

"Now, sir, what does this mean?

"Under the guise of friendship you have won my confidence, and having won it, have sought to betray me.

"What was your motive?"

The other did not answer a word, but still stood, with folded arms, gazing defiantly at Kit.

"Had it not been for my friend's shrewdness," continued Barton, "you might have been successful, but he penetrated your disguise, and warned me to watch you.

"It is the fable of the viper warmed in one's bosom repeated in real life.

"Answer, now, and tell me what your designs were."

"Answer! or by the blue vault above us I will send you to eternity before yonder sailing cloud hides the sun!"

And raising his revolver, he pointed it at Worthington, with an expression that was not to be mistaken.

What the result might have been, had not Frank interfered, it is impossible to judge, but the latter calling out to Kit, hastily cried:

"Hold on, Kit, and don't be rash!"

"You have nothing to gain by this man's death, and all to lose."

"Before inflicting on him the punishment he deserves, consider for a moment how important his secret is to you."

"Try the effect of a little solitary confinement on him, first, and see what result that will produce."

"You are right, Frank," replied Kit, lowering his weapon.

"He would carry his secret with him were I to shoot him now."

"We will wait until dark, and then take him to his prison, where we will leave him to meditate on his misdeeds, and in time, perhaps, he may consider it worth while to purchase his freedom by speaking."

"We will secure the gentleman again, and then turn in, for I am dead sleepy, and suppose that you would not object to a nap."

"You bet your pile I wouldn't," replied Faro Frank, stretching his arms until the joints

cracked and yawning until it seemed as if he would dislocate his jaws.

"Then put up the horses, and come back, and we will turn in."

As soon as Frank returned they secured Worthington by tying him firmly, attaching the ends of the rope to their right and left wrists, so that the prisoner could not move without disturbing them and then stretched themselves on blankets, with the captured man in the middle.

They slept without interruption until late at night and then, Frank having brought the three horses around, they mounted and rode off to The Gulch.

And as soon as the town had settled into slumber, they passed quietly along the main street, meeting no one, and proceeded up the road until they reached the gully in the bluff.

Here they stopped, and, the prisoner having been securely blindfolded some time before, they helped him to alight.

CHAPTER XVI.

KIT'S DISCOVERY.

DURING all this time Worthington had not uttered a word but stood, silently awaiting whatever might happen, evidently realizing that he was powerless.

He was half-led, half-dragged up the ravine, until they came to the place where the two logs were lying, side by side, Frank, meantime, wondering what on earth Kit was driving at and where he intended securing their prisoner.

Reaching the pile of brush that hid the ends of the two logs, Kit stopped, and turning to Frank, said:

"I am now going to make you familiar with a secret which has been so carefully guarded by me that, besides myself, not a soul on earth is acquainted with it."

"I need not ask you to respect my confidence, for I know you to be honor itself."

"Watch this man until I return."

And crawling between the logs, having moved the pile of brush, Kit disappeared.

He had not long been absent when he again appeared, and rising hurriedly, said to Frank, while his whole frame quivered with excitement and his voice trembled:

"Some one has discovered the entrance to my cavern, and now entrance is impossible, as the means no longer exist."

"I must investigate the matter immediately, and to do so, must return to The Gulch for ropes."

"Are there any at your place?"

"There is a whole coil of inch rope lying in a closet in the back room."

"I don't know where it came from, it having been there since we took possession."

"Waken old Pete and make him give it to you. I will wait for you."

"All right; I'll hurry back."

And Kit disappeared and was soon heard galloping down the road.

It was an hour before he returned, during which time Frank kept silent watch over Worthington, and then Kit, throwing the coil at Frank's foot, took the end of the rope in his hand and again crawled into the opening.

Once in there, he fastened the end he held to the ring in the trap, and releasing the catch, lowered the platform to the bottom of the shaft, and then called to Frank to tie the rope securely to a stout tree.

When the reply came back that all was made fast, Kit, grasping the rope, swung off into the pit, and lowered himself down into the black darkness, and soon reached the bottom in safety.

Without a moment's hesitation, he stepped into the corridor, and, striking a match, lighted the lamp that hung there, seeming entirely careless of the fact that, thus standing in the glare, he offered a fair mark to any one in the cavern beyond.

Walking along rapidly, he entered the vaulted room and lighted a second lamp, then looking hastily around.

All was quiet, save a rushing sound that proceeded from one corner of the chamber, and which, though much modified, he had often noticed before, and had attributed to the neighborhood of some subterranean stream.

Going in the direction of the noise, he soon saw that his provision-chest had been tampered with, for it was open, and then looking toward the wall, his eyes encountered the black and yawning hole through which Jordan had plunged headlong.

Returning and taking the lamp, he again walked to the opening, a gust of fresh and damp air causing his light to flicker, and approaching as close as he dared, he looked out.

A few feet below the floor of the cavern rolled

the black flood with its swiftly-flowing current, and seemed like the river Styx, so dark and mysterious was it.

"I knew there was a stream somewhere near here, but never thought that it was so close at hand, or that the rock was so thin."

"Whoever has been here has evidently stumbled in the darkness, and fallen headlong into the river."

"But where has his body been carried to?"

"Well, as far as he is concerned, my secret is still safe, and I do not imagine that my friend Worthington will endeavor to escape by that route."

"So I will return and lower him into the cavern, and leave him here for a time, and see if that will have any effect."

So, replacing the lamp on the shelf and extinguishing it, he again walked to the shaft, and blowing out the lamp there, he then hoisted himself, hand over hand, to the top.

Rejoining Frank, he, in answer to the questions propounded by the latter, replied:

"Yes, somebody has been down there; but whoever it was will never bother us."

"I'll explain to you later."

And then he released Worthington's feet, and drawing up the rope, fastened it under his arms, and ordered him to crawl into the opening between the logs, and to let himself down into the shaft, when he and Frank would lower him to the bottom.

"And if you don't," added Frank, "why we'll chuck you in."

Then Worthington, seeing that he had no recourse, crawled in, and soon the weight on the rope warned the two friends that he had swung off, so letting the cord out by degrees, they slowly lowered him.

When he was at the bottom, Kit also entered the hole, and let himself down again, and arrived at the bottom, took the rope from Worthington's shoulders, and led him into the cavern.

Here he removed the bandage from his eyes, and untied his hands and spoke:

"You will be a prisoner here, in utter darkness, without food or drink, for twenty-four hours, when I will return."

"If you confess then, I will release you, and you can go your way."

"If you are still obdurate, I will furnish you with food and drink, and again leave you, but I swear that I will never release you until you have told me what I wish to know."

"You cannot possibly escape, and I warn you not to move about here, as there are hidden dangers which might cause you trouble."

"Before going, I will relieve you of your pocketbook, that may prove valuable."

"Do not resist, or my knife may temper your excitement."

And feeling inside Worthington's coat, he drew out a large pocketbook, that seemed to be stuffed with paper.

Then, finding the passage with some difficulty, he made the rope fast to the ring in the trap, climbed up, drew the platform after him, and secured it to the catch, and then rejoined Frank.

Having pulled the pile of brush back into its place, they walked down the gully, and riding into The Gulch, stabled their horses and then entered The Broadway.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE TORN LETTER.

LIGHTING the lamp, the two friends seated themselves on opposite sides of the table, and Kit drew from his pocket the book he had taken from Worthington.

Opening it, he spread the papers on the table and proceeded to examine them.

"All is fair in war, Frank, and if we can surprise the enemy's secrets we are certainly justified in doing so."

"Let's see what we have here."

"First, a letter to Craig Colton, Esq., sent to that gentleman from New York."

"I'll read such extracts to you as may be of interest to us."

"But how do you suppose that Worthington obtained possession of all these?"

"He is, no doubt, Colton's agent, and is carrying out the latter's plans."

"That is more than likely."

"D. has again been here, and speaks of his mine as being the richest in the country, but refuses to tell me where it is."

"He will soon be back at The Gulch, and you must watch him closely if you would discover the location of this bonanza that is to make our fortunes."

"And here is another:

"D. came here again to-night and wrote a letter, which he finished and held in his hand as he rose, saying he felt badly and wanted air.

"Before he could reach the window he fell heavily to the floor, having fainted, still grasping the letter firmly.

"Thinking it might be of importance to us to obtain possession of the document, as I had seen that it began 'My dear Child,' and was doubtless addressed to his daughter, I tried to loosen his grasp, but in vain; and hearing somebody coming, I tore from him what I could of the letter, and hastily put it in my pocket.

"Just then a friend dropped in, and I sent him for an ambulance, and we removed D. to his hotel, where he soon recovered and fell asleep, promising to be all right in the morning."

"And here is a third, in the same writing, all of these being signed 'C':

"D. went to Colorado to-day. I saw him this morning, and he seemed to have forgotten all about the events of last night, the shock having affected his memory.

"I have the torn scrap, and will show it to you when you come East. Push matters, and when D. is disposed of, and his charming daughter is out of the way, get all the papers you can and come on at once.

"Those two being out of the way, we will have no difficulty in establishing our claim. I have the deed all ready, and so carefully prepared that D. himself would not know that his signature was forged."

"These letters evidently refer to Dainty and her father, and Colton evidently had an associate in New York, as they are dated from that city.

"The other paper refers to matters in which we are not interested.

"I wish we had that torn scrap; it might give us a valuable clew."

"There is nothing more in that pocket-book?"

"Not a thing."

"Colton is not a man to let an important thing like that remain out of his possession.

"Chuck me that book."

"I'd give something to know how Worthington obtained possession of it."

And taking the book, Faro Frank began to feel it delicately all over, with his practical fingers, and suddenly stopped and drew a penknife from his pocket.

Opening this, he began, carefully and leisurely, to cut the lining, and after a few moments, drew from its hiding place a small piece of paper, folded carefully into a small compass.

Handing it to Kit, he said:

"It's dollars to cents that this is the identical scrap you want."

"Open it and see."

Unfolding it slowly, and taking care not to tear it, Kit spread it on the table and cried to Frank:

"You are right, my friend, as indeed you always—or nearly so—are."

"You can see that it has been torn, and is evidently the identical scrap that Colton's unknown correspondent snatched from the hand of the insensible man."

"But," he continued, after carefully reading the few words the torn scrap contained—

"We are as much in the dark as ever."

"Without the rest of the sheet, it is impossible to make head or tail out of this."

"It proves one thing, though; that the visitor mentioned in the letters as 'D,' was certainly Mr. Danford."

"How do you make that out?"

"I know his writing, well, and this is his beyond question."

"Let's hear it."

"Read for yourself."

And Frank, laying the paper before him, his elbows on the table and his chin in his hands, read the words we have already seen and which is here given again as being one of the most important features of this true tale:

"*MY DEAR CHILD:*—Fearing

happen to me, I wri
for you, that you
the mine which wi
From a point nor
are familiar wi
southeast an
one hundred
ding into
in the be
chip awa
it can be ra
through the open
Follow on down the
find something tha
attention, which inves
"Your loving f
"HENRY DA"

When he had finished, Frank said:

"'Henry Da' doubtless means 'Henry Danford,' but that is all that I can make of it."

"The thing is worse than a Chinese puzzle, and I can't make head or tail of it."

"My advice is, Kit, that we put these things away until morning, go to bed and sleep on it."

"I think you are right, and poor Charley must be pretty well tired out."

"Put these in your safe, and I will come around during the afternoon."

And bidding Frank good-night, Kit went to the hotel, relieved and thanked Charley, and then, going to his room, was soon fast asleep.

CHAPTER XVIII.

RETRIBUTION.

LEFT to himself, Worthington, or Colton, as he may be indifferently called, seated himself on the dry sand and began to think.

He heard Kit draw up the trap, heard the snap of the catch at the top of the shaft as it flew into place, and realized that he was alone, a hundred feet underground in an unknown cave, the size and location of which were entirely unknown to him.

The darkness was so intense that it weighed on him like an incubus, and he would have given worlds for a single match, although he felt that if he had one, he would fear to light it, lest it might bring additional horrors to his amazed glance.

He was tired, ravenously hungry, and consumed by a thirst that burned and tortured him beyond expression, and this was added to and intensified by the sound of the rushing waters not far off.

And yet he feared to move, remembering as he did Kit's warning:

"Do not move, as there are hidden dangers about here which might cause you trouble!"

"A pretty scrape I have gotten myself into," he soliloquized, "and a worse one I'll be tomorrow or to-night, or whenever it is that those men are to return."

"They will have read those criminative papers by that time, and I'll not stand much show."

"They evidently do not suspect my actual identity, and I had best concoct some explanation that will account for my having them in my possession."

"I will continue to play the role of Mr. Edward Worthington, and will purchase my freedom by revealing to them Colton's plans, giving them, of course, a false statement."

"And once out of this horrible dungeon I will get up some scheme for vengeance that will make Kit Barton and Mistress Dainty wish that they had never been born."

"How I would like a drink of that water that nearly maddens me with its cool flashing, sounding so near, yet being so far!"

"Surely if I crawl slowly over there, feeling every inch of the way, I cannot injure myself."

"Anything, even sudden death, is preferable to this torturing thirst."

"Oh for a match! one little paltry match! and though its light should show to me all the powers of darkness, yet would I strike it that it might guide me to yonder stream."

"But, courage, Craig!"

"You are in a pretty bad scrape, but your good luck has not yet deserted you, so here goes for water or death!"

And, inch by inch, he began to crawl forward in the direction of the sound, carefully feeling the sandy surface before he ventured to allow his weight to rest on his outstretched hand.

Slowly and laboriously he pursued his way, scarce gaining a foot a minute, but steadily approaching his goal.

Inch by inch he crawled on, until his feeling fingers touched the cold surface of the rock and he stood upright by the opening through which Jordan had crashed, and, still moving cautiously, leaned over the edge.

The water sounded as if flowing just below him and taking his hat in his hand he stooped over, trying to scoop up some of the cooling fluid.

But he could not reach it, and maddened by his thirst leaned still further over, when the rock crumbled slightly and losing his balance he fell headlong into the water.

Struggling and gasping, he was swept on down the stream and precisely the same thing happened to him that had happened to his tool, Jordan.

But when he escaped from the swirling waters of the pool at the bottom of the fall, it was pitch dark, and, nearly frozen as he was, he felt that he scarce possessed the strength to walk a hundred yards, yet, seeing a light shining through the trees not very far off, he began to

walk as rapidly as he could, in his exhausted condition, toward the beacon.

But as he neared the glade, he stumbled and fell into a pile of brush, that cracked and snapped beneath his weight, with a noise that could be heard for rods, and when he regained his feet the light had disappeared.

But knowing the general direction, he again staggered on, until he reached the opening, and saw, looming indistinctly before him a dark mass which he judged to be the house, and with renewed energy, pressed on.

But at that instant there arose a most horrible din, a screeching and a yelling that nearly split his ear, and a weird, blue glare broke out over the scene, while two-score of skeletons, dancing and nodding and with their ghastly jaws grinning and chattering extended their feet as if about to advance toward him.

One wild, haggard look around, a fearful scream that sounded scarcely like a human being's, and Colton, turning, spun around once or twice and fell insensible to the earth.

How long he remained unconscious he knew not, but when he regained his senses, he was lying on a cot in a strange room, while Jordan bent anxiously over him.

It was some moments before he could speak, and then he whispered faintly:

"Where am I; what has happened?"

"Nothing, captain, except that I gave you a little scare."

"I did not recognize you at first, and set the machinery in motion to try and frighten off whoever might be coming."

"I heard you crashing through the bushes, being awake with the lamp lighted, and did not know who it was."

"But as soon as I saw that it was you, I went out and picked you up and brought you in here."

"It was hard work pulling you through, but I succeeded at last, and now you'll be all right."

"Is it daylight yet?"

"Yes, and has been for hours. How did you ever get here?"

"I suppose you must have taken the same involuntary road that I did, judging from your drenched condition."

"Oh, I remember all now; the horrible cave, the fearful darkness, the splash into the water, the struggle for life and the being hurled into the air to what I thought was certain death."

"And then the awful scene that burst on me as I entered the glade!"

"It was a premonition of the hereafter!"

"Back! back! you demons!" he shrieked, as he rose from the cot, while Jordan vainly endeavored to hold him.

"Back, I say!" and falling to the floor, he writhed and struggled in the terrible agonies of an epileptic fit, which, when it had passed, left him quiet, but with his mind a blank.

The awful experiences of the last few hours had unbalanced his mind, and Colton was insane, and, although quiet and easily controlled had no spark of reason left.

It was retribution!

CHAPTER XIX.

A SURPRISE.

WHEN Kit awakened and after they had all enjoyed a good breakfast, Frank having been invited to join them at their noon-day meal, they all three read and re-read the fragment of the letter taken from Colton's pocket.

But they could arrive at no result and came to the conclusion that the paper was valueless without its companion piece.

"The letter I read that Colton received and which was apparently the last one sent by his unknown correspondent, stated that your father had been stricken down with an attack of vertigo."

"And when he had recovered, the next morning, he seemed to have totally forgotten the occurrences of the night previous."

"Now, one of two things: either the scrap of paper was lost, or he secreted it somewhere, not knowing exactly what he was doing."

"In either case it is not in our power to obtain possession of it, and the only thing left for us to do is to compel Worthington to tell us what he knows, and if he refuses, why then we will see what force will do."

"Should all our efforts in that direction result in nothing, then I will track Colton and force him to surrender his knowledge."

"What do you think, Frank?"

"I think that you are correct and that if Mr. Worthington declines to confess we will make it lively for him."

"And if that fails, why Colton is your man,

and if I were you, I would follow him to the end of the world, and jump off after him, if it were necessary."

"Well, suppose that we ride up the road and call on Worthington."

"He must have had enough of his solitary confinement by this time."

"All right. Does Mrs. Barton go with us?"

"If she wishes to."

"What do you say, Dainty?"

"I think not, Kit dear."

"I am not feeling very well, and prefer to remain in the house to-day."

"You will not be gone long?"

"Two hours at furthest. I think that we can accomplish all we wish in that time."

"If Worthington should prove obdurate, we will give him another twenty-four hours of the cavern."

"But, Kit," pleaded Dainty, "furnish him with food and drink at least."

"Oh, of course. There is plenty in the cave of both to keep him for weeks. I'll see that he does not want for anything and will leave him a light this time. He might get to wandering around and fall into the river, the opening in the wall being decidedly dangerous to any one who might walk in that direction."

And soon Frank and Kit were on their way to the cave, which they reached in due course of time, and having secured their horses, scrambled up the gully.

"I'll go down after you, Kit," said Frank, who was decidedly curious to visit the place, "that is if you have no objection."

"None in the world; in fact I was going to suggest it to you. You can aid me most materially, no doubt, in the cross-examination to which I propose to put Worthington."

"I will call out when I reach the bottom and will wait there for you."

"I suppose you can climb down the rope without any difficulty?"

"I should rather think so. I didn't own a yacht four or five years for nothing."

"Well, come along as soon as you hear me call out."

"But be careful and don't fall down the shaft, and be sure and crawl in head-first, keeping hold of the rope."

"You will find that you have plenty of room in which to turn around."

"All right; go ahead, I'll follow."

And Kit dived into the opening, reached the shaft, and lowered himself to the bottom, when he called to Frank to "Come on!" and then, having lighted the lamp, waited.

In a few moments his friend and ally stood by his side, puffing and blowing, and looking up toward the top of the shaft, shaking his head doubtfully.

"It may be all right, Kit," he said mournfully, as if he had lost all hope.

"But you may as well send me a year's provisions when you get to the top; I'll never be able to climb that distance."

"Oh, don't fear; you'll get out all right."

"But let's hunt up Worthington; he'll be decidedly glad to see us, I warrant, although he knows that we do not come as friends."

And followed by Frank, he walked along the passage until he came to the cavern, when he called out:

"Worthington!"

But there came no answer, and Kit continued, as he walked cautiously over to where the other lamp stood:

"Asleep or sulking, probably the latter."

"I'll soon have a light though, and find out which it is."

And lighting the lamp, by the bright glare it soon cast over all the surroundings, the whole cavern was soon distinctly visible.

Looking hastily around he cried:

"Gone, by all the gods!"

"Escaped?"

"Hardly that, although he is not here."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that he has either become maddened by the darkness and awful silence, intensified by that rushing sound off yonder where that opening yawns, or else, craving a drink of water, he sought it, and in either case has fallen into the subterranean river."

"And then, where is he?"

"Carried, doubtless, into the bowels of the earth, and drowned or crushed to pieces long before this."

"It was an awful fate and a punishment to him for his crimes."

"But I never anticipated this, or I should have guarded against it."

"I warned him that there were hidden dan-

gers near, but he either forgot, or did not heed my caution."

"Then it is no fault of yours."

"No, not directly; but indirectly, I feel that I am to blame."

"Well, do not worry about it any more; he is gone and deserved death. My only regret is that he has carried his secret with him, for that means a trip to Europe for you. But tell me, Kit, how on earth did you ever discover this place? And what millions there are in sight! You only have to take a pick and strike a few blows, and there you are with a few thousands lying at your feet."

"Yes, the walls are nearly solid with gold. I will tell you about it this evening. And now let us leave this spot."

And extinguishing the lamps Kit climbed to the top, being quickly followed by Frank, who, despite his lamentations, proved himself an excellent gymnast and drew himself up without difficulty.

And everything being left in its natural condition, the two descended the gully, mounted and rode back to The Gulch.

CHAPTER XX.

VICTORY!

WHEN they were all seated in Dainty's little parlor that evening, Kit, Frank and Mrs. Barton, Kit began:

"It was not very long before I came here, that I made the acquaintance of an old man, in New York, under rather peculiar circumstances.

"I was, at that time, connected with a newspaper, and was obliged to remain at the office until two or three o'clock in the morning, and thus did not get to my rooms on Twenty-fifth street until late.

"One morning, as I had nearly reached my lodgings, I saw, lying on the sidewalk, the figure of a man, but thinking that probably liquor was the cause, and the night being warm and pleasant, was about to pass on when I saw, by the light of a neighboring street lamp, that his head was all bloody.

"Of course I immediately stopped and examined him, when I found that he had been struck by some blunt weapon and severely injured by the blow.

"I went in search of assistance, but, of course, could not find any one, so, seeing that the injured man was old, respectable-looking and handsomely dressed, I picked him up and carried him to my sitting-room, where I laid him on the lounge, and then went for a physician.

"One with whom I was acquainted lived in the neighborhood, and in answer to my summons he hurried to the room, and did what he could for the sufferer, who soon recovered consciousness and was able to tell how he had been attacked by foot-pads, knocked down and robbed."

"For being unable to sleep, he had started out to walk about a little and not being familiar with the city had become lost.

"He was soon made as comfortable as the circumstances would permit, and the doctor took his departure, promising to return during the day and see how the patient progressed.

"But no sooner had the door closed on the physician, than the injured man, forgetful of the injunction to remain quiet and not to talk, turned his eyes on me and said:

"You must tell me what your name is, that I may know who it is that has showed and is showing me all this kindness."

"My name is Barton."

"Barton!" cried he, excitedly; "but your first name, what is that?"

"Christopher, sir."

"Not the son of Christopher Barton, at one time importer of Chinese goods?"

"He was my father, the firm being Barton and Hale."

"And what was your mother's maiden name?"

"Mary Neale."

"Then you are the very man I came to New York to see, and I can yet make reparation before I die."

"I was your father's partner."

"I defrauded him and fled to California, and now that I am rich I can restore to the son that which I stole from the father."

"But, tell me, is he yet alive?"

"The shock of his failure killed him, and my mother did not long survive the blow."

"Hurry! hurry!" he shrieked, "and bring me a lawyer before it is too late!"

"At that moment some one tapped on the door, and opening it, I found there a gentleman who occupied a room near mine, and who, hear-

ing the noise, had asked the doctor, whom he saw going out, what was the matter.

"Having learned what had happened, he had come to see if he could be of any service, and as he was an attorney of high standing, he was just the man I wanted."

"Telling the old gentleman the facts, he requested the lawyer to take from his pocket a bundle of papers, in which was a will, made a year before, in my favor, in which he left me everything he possessed."

"The document was accurately drawn, signed sealed and witnessed, and pronounced by the lawyer without a flaw."

"Then Mr. Hale dictated a confession to Mr. Wales, as the lawyer was named, acknowledging his defalcations and his embezzlement of the firm's funds, which led to my father's failure, and stated that he left me all he owned in the world, not having a relative on earth, and desiring to make partial restitution to the son of the man he had robbed."

"When he had signed this, he handed me a small package, begged my forgiveness, and then, overcome by excitement and the shock, fell back, insensible."

"The physician was called immediately, but he never rallied from his stupor and died in an hour."

"To make a long story short, I will finish by saying that on opening the package I found it contained a description of the mine lately visited and directions how to visit it."

"So coming here, I took possession and found that my wealth was so vast that I could not comprehend it."

"And now you have the story of how I gained possession of the mine."

"It is but right that you should have it, Kit," said Frank, "and it is yours of right, as Mr. Hale certainly owed his fortune to the start he made with the embezzled funds."

"He—"

"Oh, Kit, see here!" suddenly interrupted Dainty, who had been toying with her father's locket, which was suspended to her neck by a slender chain, and having broken the chain, had opened the locket.

"This is not the paper I once got out of here; the locket has two sides that open and I thought it only had one."

"What is the paper, Dainty?"

"A torn sheet, that evidently is part of a letter, judging from the writing."

With a glance at Frank that seemed to say:

"Can it be possible!"

Kit took the crumpled sheet and opened it and read these words:

"that something may
te this memorandum
may know how to reach
ll be your inheritance.
th of the cross which you
th, the creek bends to the
d going down this exactly
yards, you will, on wa-
the stream, find a flat stone,
d of the brook.
y the mortar which holds it and
ised, when the water will flow
ing thus made.
creek and you will
t will attract your
estigate.
ather,
NFORD."

And Kit, looking first at Dainty and then at Frank, cried "Victory!" and then executed a maniacal war-dance in the middle of the floor.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE PARTS UNITED.

DAINTY gazed at her husband's gyrations in amazement, for he had not told her of his having found the other half of the torn sheet in Worthington's pocket, and she could not comprehend Kit's excitement.

But he soon subsided, and procuring a large sheet of paper, he drew from his pocket the half that he had taken from Worthington, and pasted it smoothly down.

Then taking the paper that Dainty had found, he pasted that alongside the other, finding that the jagged edges, where the sheet had been torn, fitted exactly.

And then, the letter being complete, Kit read it to his two interested and excited listeners, who fairly hung on the words:

"MY DEAR CHILD:-

"Fearing that something may happen to me, I write this memorandum for you, that you may know how to reach the mine which will be your inheritance."

"From a point north of the cross which you are familiar with, the creek bends to the southeast and going down this one hundred yards, you will, on

wading into the stream, find a flat stone in the bed of the brook.

"Chip away the mortar which holds it and it can be raised, when the water will flow through the opening thus made."

"Follow on down the creek, and you will find something that will attract your attention, which investigate."

"Your loving father,
"HENRY DANFORD."

For a moment a dead silence reigned, and then Frank gave a wild yell that rattled the window frames, and brought the landlord tumbling up from the office, he thinking that some one was being killed.

But learning that it was only Faro Frank, he retired, when Kit was compelled to read the document over and over again.

Finally, after the third or fourth reading, Dainty put in a word.

"I know the locality referred to very well," said she, "my father having pointed out the cross-cut in the rock, in memory, he said, of some one who was killed there by a falling rock."

"It is west of here some distance, and is on the main road."

"If you would like to ride in that direction now, I will point out the place to you."

"I think that we had better wait until tomorrow, as it is too late now to do anything."

"Frank, will you come around early and go with us?"

"Most assuredly I will; I am as anxious to see the end of this thing as you can possibly be."

"I'll be around bright and early."

And going to The Broadway, Faro Frank made sure of not missing his engagement by staying up all night.

The next morning the three rode away to the west, passing the gully that led to Kit's "den," he pointing it out to Dainty and promising to make her acquainted with its mysteries in the near future.

They rode on some distance further, when Dainty, who had been watching the left-hand side of the road for a few minutes, suddenly stopped, and pointing high up on the cliff, called the attention of Kit and Frank to a rude cross cut in the rock.

"There is what my father refers to in his letter," she said, "and we must go due north from here to the creek."

So, dismounting and fastening their horses to a small tree near by, they commenced the ascent of the north bank, which was here gently sloping, and could easily be climbed.

A brisk walk of half a mile, they guiding themselves by Kit's compass, brought them to the banks of a noisy, brawling mountain stream, that flowed nearly due east and west, but a few feet below them turned abruptly to the southeast.

Taking this point as their starting-place, they measured a hundred yards, as nearly as they could by pacing off the distance, and then Kit, who had on a pair of hip-boots, waded into the shallow water and walked up and down, feeling with his feet for the flat stone mentioned in the letter.

He was soon successful, finding, after a few moments' search, a flat surface beneath his feet that was probably four feet square.

"The second point mentioned by Mr. Danford is now found," called out Kit, "and now we must devise some means by which we may be able to remove the mortar and lift this stone."

"Come, Frank, where is your imagination?

"Can't you suggest something?"

"Of course I can," replied Frank, with an assumption of wounded dignity.

"All we have to do is to build a dam across the creek sufficiently high to stop the flow of water above for a time, and we can easily work at the bed of the creek."

"Yes," responded Kit, sarcastically.

"That is an excellent plan."

"It would not take us more than a week or two to build such a dam as you suggest, and of course the water would stop running from above while we were working, and would not rise as the dam rose and flow over the top."

And he looked quizzically at Frank, who removed his hat and scratched his head, evidently appreciating, for the first time, the difficulties that Kit suggested.

"I never was much at civil engineering, anyhow, Kit," he at length confessed frankly, "and I guess I'll have to give it up."

"Let me help you out," quietly interrupted Dainty, who had been an amused spectator of this scene.

"Get a gun-cotton cartridge, water-proofed, of course, and explode it on the stove."

"You can easily do that, and as the explosive force of the material is tremendous, you can easily shatter the stone to pieces."

"An excellent suggestion, Mrs. Barton, and in view of it I hereby tender my resignation as mining engineer-in-chief to Christopher Barton, Esq."

"But where did you get your ideas regarding explosives?"

"Oh, my father was quite a chemist; but will you have any difficulty in procuring a battery?"

"None in the least; my brother has one, and also plenty of gun-cotton."

"He is always fooling with such things, and has nearly blown himself up with the stuff a half a dozen times."

"I'll ride to The Gulch and get him to come and bring his infernal machine along."

"Meantime, Kit, you hunt about and see if you can't find a crevice into which we can insert the cartridge; but for fear that none exists, I will bring a crowbar back with me, and we can dig a hole underneath the stone."

"You have no objection to Charley's coming back with me?"

"Not the slightest; bring Dan along, too, if he is up."

"I have no secrets from you three."

"And they could not be in safer hands."

And then Frank, hurrying down the hill, reached the horses and rode off to The Gulch.

CHAPTER XXII.

AN EXPLOSION.

WHILE they awaited the return of Faro Frank, Dainty seated herself on a fallen tree, while Kit busied himself looking for some place in which they might place the explosive.

But he attained no other result than that of wetting himself from head to foot, finally emerging from the stream dripping and cold.

But he was able to stand any such exposure, and although chilled to the bone, did not fear any serious results.

While waiting, Dainty told him much about her father; how he had left home when she was yet very young, and gone to Colorado, remaining away several years, and then returning, had found his wife dead, and his daughter in the care of friends.

Settling up his affairs in Pennsylvania, he had again left his former home, gone to Philadelphia, and, leaving Dainty there, had gone to New York, where he remained several days.

When she again saw him, he seemed much changed, and was suspicious of every one he met and fretful.

He told her that she would, one day, be immensely wealthy, but would not divulge to her in what direction her wealth lay.

They had been in Colorado but a short time when her father had been killed, and she had never learned from him where his mine was located, although he often mentioned it.

He thought that he was to be robbed of his riches and kept aloof from every one, remaining in his cabin and covering sheet after sheet of paper with figures, always destroying his calculations when he had finished them.

She had reached this point in her story when suddenly they were interrupted by the return of Frank, who was accompanied by his brother, the latter carrying a small mahogany box and a satchel.

Greetings having been exchanged, Frank who carried an iron bar across his shoulder, walked to the bank of the creek and said:

"Well, Kit, what luck?"

"None at all, Frank, I can not find a hole big enough to stick my finger into."

"I guess we'll have to fall back on your crow-bar suggestion."

"Here, let me have it."

And again Kit waded into the stream and began to dig a hole in the gravel-bed of the stream, just at the edge of the stone.

While he was thus occupied, Charley, opening the satchel took from it a handful of loose gun-cotton and began stuffing it into an elongated oil-skin bag, which, when filled, resembled a section of bologna sausage, into one end of which he inserted a wire, and then tied it up tightly.

"But where is Mr. Burton?" suddenly inquired Dainty.

"Oh, Dan? he'll be along presently; he had some scheme, I don't know what; but promised to join us soon."

"Charley, walk over to the road and show him the way up here."

Before the latter returned, Kit had completed his work and again waded ashore, which he had just reached when Charley and Dan arrived, the latter carrying a huge basket.

"What in the world have you there, Dan?" asked Frank, eying the basket curiously.

"Lunch."

"Good idea, we will build a fire, warm the coffee—if you have any—and then, having exploded the cartridge, will have something to eat while the water is running off."

Charley and Dan were completely ignorant of what the others intended doing; but asked no questions, contenting themselves with following Kit's and Frank's directions.

Taking the cartridge Charley had prepared, Kit placed it in the hole he had made and which extended several inches under the stone, and then handed the end of the wire to the young fellow, who taking his box, walked off a couple of hundred yards, uncoiling the wire as he went, and calling the others after him.

He then placed the box on the ground and inserted the end of the wire in the side, fastening it in its place with a clamp.

"This box," he explained, as his friends gathered about him, "contains an electric battery."

"To explode the cartridge, it is only necessary to press this button, when the wires will be connected, and the spark will flash into the cotton."

"For in this insulated cord that leads to the cartridge, there are two wires and the open ends will produce the flash."

"Look!"

"Stop!" cried Frank, as Charley was about to press the button.

"As Mrs. Barton is more interested in this result than any of us, as it is a legacy from her father to her, let hers be the hand that opens up the road to her fortune!"

"You are right, Frank, but do not forget that I am ignorant of what results you expect to obtain, or I, myself, would have suggested what you have proposed."

"I know it, old man; but be patient a while and you will learn all."

And then Dainty, extending her hand, pressed firmly on the button, following Charley's directions, and at the touch there came a muffled roar from the bed of the creek, the water was thrown high aloft and numbers of stones and fragments of rock flew far and wide.

And immediately after the explosion they all hurried to the bank of the stream and there saw, yawning in the middle of the bed, a hole that was a yard or more in diameter.

The flat stone that had covered it had been blown into a thousand fragments, and the water in the stream now flowed uninterruptedly into this new opening, channels having been cut leading to it from each bank, being in the shape of a letter V, with the open end turned up-stream.

The bed of the brook, below the hole was rapidly becoming dry, and while waiting for all of the water to run off, they made a fire, warmed the coffee and partook freely of the lunch that Dan's thoughtfulness had provided for them.

When they had completed their meal, they all arose, and Kit leading, they walked on down the stream for a mile or more, carefully surveying every foot of the ground, until suddenly Kit stopped and examined some object that had attracted his attention.

And as the others came up, they saw it was an iron bar, projecting a foot or so from the sandy bottom, which was crossed by another bar at right angles.

"Frank or Charley or Dan," said Kit, "one of us will have to go back for the crowbar, for we cannot dig this out with our hands."

"You wait here while I go after it."

The others demurred but Kit insisted and started back, while the impetuous Frank, stooping down, began to scrape away the wet sand with his hands.

And in a few moments he brought to light the top of an iron box, rusty from the action of the water, and which was buried deep in the sand, and could not be moved.

So giving it up, he contented himself with waiting for Kit's return, which happened before many minutes passed.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE FATAL POOL.

JORDAN watched Colton warily for some time, but, as he had no recurrence of his paroxysms, he gradually recovered from the fear into which the other's wild cries had thrown him, and took a calm view of his situation.

"I don't know what is going to become of me, imprisoned in an inaccessible canyon, in the company of a maniac and a lot of grinning skeletons."

"Look as I can, I can find no way out of this

accursed place, and I seem doomed to remain here for the rest of my natural life.

"And who knows at what hour Colton may again be seized, and going stark mad, strangle me while I sleep?"

"I sometimes almost regret that crime which forced me to flee from the society I once adorned, and compelled me to change my name, my appearance, my very language."

"A nice position this for an educated and highly cultured man to be placed in."

"I'll walk to the north end of the canyon, the only one I have not yet explored, and see if I can find any way to get out."

"And if I succeed, may I be hanged if I don't get back to New York and to the 'Fresh Clam' just as fast as steam will carry me!"

"I'm sick of this whole business, and wish that I had never undertaken it."

"But, as Colton knew my secret, and would have exposed me if I had refused to obey him, there was nothing to be done except to consent."

Finishing his monologue, Jordan rose and left the cabin, first arranging the stuffed figure in position opposite the door, so that any one entering and not familiar with the secret would almost inevitably be shot.

Colton had preceded him, and now stood, looking up at the sky, and gibbering and chattering to himself, being perfectly idiotic.

But happening to glance around, he caught sight of the skeletons, and with a fearful yell, bounded off across the glade, and disappeared in the wood just as Jordan came out.

The latter looked after the fleeing man, with a cruel smile, and laughed sardonically.

"If Mr. Colton makes any bad breaks, I'll have to get rid of him."

"I don't propose to have my night's rest disturbed by a lunatic."

"I only hope he'll break his neck stumbling about the woods."

"If he attempts to enter the cabin, it is ten to one that he gets shot by the dummy figure standing there, and it is certain that if such a thing happens, he will not die through any fault of mine."

So, following the course pursued by Colton, he walked off through the woods, gradually bearing to the west, and soon coming to the banks of the stream fed by the waterfall.

And as he looked down into the clear water he saw, glinting and sparkling in the sunlight, and lying thick at the bottom of the stream, thousands upon thousands of yellow specks, which he knew to be gold.

"If I can only find my way out of this place," he cried, "I will take enough of that stuff with me to be rich for life."

"But precious as it would be under any other circumstances, it is valueless to me just now."

"I'll keep on down the canyon and try and find out where this stream's outlet is; but if it again plunges into the earth, that is sufficient for the present."

"No more subterranean voyages for me!"

The canyon in which he found himself trapped was a quarter of a mile wide and four times that in length, being surrounded, as has been stated before, by cliffs that were utterly inaccessible, being as steeply precipitous and abrupt as a brick wall, and it did not take long for him to reach the lower end.

And here he stopped in amazement, for before him was a deserted mining-camp, or at least the remains of one, for most of it had been buried hundreds of feet deep, beneath a tremendous land-slide which had evidently occurred years before.

A mass of earth had fallen from the jutting cliff that towered high aloft, and had destroyed the camp in an instant, two houses, or rather huts, alone remaining intact while from the mass of earth, projected, here and there the ends of a dozen cabins.

The falling mass had dammed the stream, and formed a small lake or pool, from which the creek, seeking an outlet, flowed east, and then south, circling the mound formed by the land-slide and then plunged underground at the foot of the northern cliff which formed the end of the canyon.

There were evidences about the place that showed that some one had been using pick and shovel there, and Jordan came to the conclusion that whoever had built the cabin he now occupied had here secured the ghastly army that guarded the glade.

For white bones could be seen scattered about, and it was evident that the mound formed one vast grave for the poor wretches thus suddenly buried beneath it.

"In that pool," soliloquized Jordan, "there

must be millions, washed down from the valley above, for the water is undoubtedly deep and the overflow cannot carry it off."

"I'll just see what a dip in that will bring out, after I have gone around to the end of the canyon."

"There is evidently no one left here from all those who once followed this fatal gold trail to the end and who doubtless amassed riches from that pool, for there was certainly quite a lake here before the land-slide."

"And doubtless they descended into the canyon down the hill which afterward slid from its foundations and buried them."

So he continued his explorations but without discovering anything further, beyond what he already knew, so he returned to the pool, and lying flat on his back, he reached as far out as he could into the water, and drew up a handful of the deposit from the bottom, the bank sloping gently at the point.

And as he opened his hand he uttered a shout of surprise, for he grasped a pile of nuggets of almost pure gold, evidently washed down from far above, ranging in size from a pin-head to a large pea, and it was evident that the bottom of the pool, particularly where the water was deepest, in the center, was one mass of yellow metal.

Nearly crazed by this sudden find he was about to rise when he was seized from behind by a hand that held him as in an iron vise, while Colton's maniacal tones shrieked in his ear:

"Ah, ha! chief of the skeleton army, I hold you now, and you shall not escape me!"

And as Jordan struggled to his feet, and half-turning, grasped the other around the waist, there began a struggle that was fearful to witness between the madman and his former slave.

And as they wrestled and fought, they circled about the pool until they came to a point where the bank was steep and abrupt and the water eight or ten feet deep.

And then Colton, with an access of frenzy, clasped his antagonist close about the neck, and with a hideous shout of wild laughter, leaped far out into the pool, and as the waters closed above them a few bubbles alone marked where they had sunk.

But a minute later the shining surface again parted, as Colton's head appeared, and with the lurid light still gleaming in his eyes he struck out and swam to shore, and clambering to the bank, rushed off into the forest.

Jordan lay drowned, his bed being the yellow metal which has lured so many to their deaths!

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE EX-GAMBLERS.

STEPPING to the center of the group, Kit placed the end of the crowbar under the edge of the box and after prying against it for a few moments, he loosened it from its sandy bed so that he was able to lift it up.

It proved to be of iron and was so hermetically sealed that not a drop of water could get into it, and was quite light.

There was no key-hole to it, and it appeared to be fastened by a spring inside, so Kit, without attempting to open it by raising the lid, using his crowbar again, managed after a quarter of an hour's continued effort, to batter the box to pieces.

It contained only a small, oblong package, which, on being opened, proved to be a description of the canyon, as it had become known to Jordan, and continued:

"My brother was the only one of the miners who escaped from the land-slide, and realizing that he was the sole possessor of this enormous wealth, built himself a solitary cabin and surrounded it with all the horrors that he could imagine to frighten off any intruders, although it seemed impossible for any one to enter the canyon."

"I was, unfortunately, absent at the time of the disaster, and was horrified on returning to learn what had occurred, but was soon relieved by seeing my brother on the top of the mound, waving to me."

"We managed to communicate with each other, and knowing that the stream which conceals this box plunged into the canyon, after a subterranean passage of some length, I conceived the idea of floating something down to him by this means."

"The plan was entirely successful, until one day, on going to the place where the stream disappears into the ground, I was amazed to find the bed dry."

"I immediately sought the cause, and discovered that by the action of the water the rocky bed had been worn away, and that the water flowed off through the hole which you found under the flat stone."

"I immediately started down the bed of the creek, taking with me a fifty-foot rope, several large spikes and a hammer I had intended sending to my brother and was overjoyed to find that I could rescue him

by lowering a rope to him from the hole where the stream found its exit into the canyon.

"But he preferred to remain where he was and to continue his labor of amassing a fortune, making me promise him, however, that I would visit him every three days."

"He showed me his house, the defenses of which were due to his mechanical ingenuity and chemical knowledge, being in part controlled by electricity."

"On the third visit I made to him, I found him dead, and overcome by the horror of the place, after burying him, I vowed never to set foot in the canyon again, closed up the hole and let the stream flow on its former course, thus closing the only entrance to the canyon."

"But should you need money, go on down the bed, through the tunnel to the mouth and there, fastening a rope to one of the spikes which doubtless yet remain, let some one lower himself down, and you will find such wealth as you never dreamed of in the pool below."

"Be careful, on entering the cabin, to avoid the top step and the floor inside the door, stepping to one side as you enter, for there is a hidden danger to be encountered in the shape of a figure holding a rifle and commanding the door."

"I leave this paper as a legacy to you, Dainty, and may tell you of it before I die; but as no one knows at what hour his summons may come I will finish and secure this."

"And that you may be always happy and never know care or sorrow, I pray, night and day."

Your loving father,

HENRY DANFORD."

A silence fell on the little party, broken only by Dainty's sobs as she listened to her father's words, that had thus strangely come to her; but Kit soon comforted her and spoke:

"It is almost certain that this stream is the same that flows past my cavern, Frank, and the gold which is washed into the cabin doubtless comes from the rocky walls of the tunnel Mr. Danford mentions."

"We will probe this thing to the end, visit the canyon, and then, after you three have worked it to your heart's content, we will again close the upper hole, allow the water to flow down this way, and reserve the secret for future years."

"I think my wife will agree with me."

"As she always does, Kit."

"And I hope that you three gentlemen will not hesitate to avail yourselves of this offer."

"Our wealth is far greater than we can ever use, as you well know, Mr. Francis," addressing Frank, "and from what I have heard my father say while talking to himself, I judge that there are millions upon millions in the canyon."

"You have been our staunch friends in trouble; share our good fortune now that the light has come at last!"

The three men looked at each other in silence for a moment, their throats swelling so that they could not utter a word, and then impetuous Frank broke out:

"Heaven bless you, Mrs. Barton for those kind words."

"Knowing a good woman like you makes better men of us, and from this hour on Faro Frank exists no longer."

"Boys, shall we turn over a new leaf and begin life anew?"

"Shall we close up The Broadway and lead another life hereafter?"

And as with one voice Dan and Charley answered:

"We will, Frank!"

"This is due to you, Mrs. Barton, and although we cannot share your fortune, we hope to share your friendship!"

"My husband's friends are mine, and there are none I cherish as highly as I do the three who are now here."

And extending her hand, she congratulated them warmly on their resolves.

Then Frank, a little ashamed of his excitement, suggested that they continue their explorations, which proposition being agreed to they all started down the bed of the stream, the happiest quintette in Colorado.

CHAPTER XXV.

CONCLUSION.

THEY soon reached the point where the stream plunged into the ground, and here the opening was but three or four feet large, so Kit was compelled to ask Dainty to refrain from attempting the passage, to which she willingly acquiesced, not caring to witness the unknown horrors of the place.

Charley volunteered to remain with her, not wishing that she should be left alone, and, despite all of her remonstrances, seated himself and told the others to go on.

They soon disappeared in the opening, crawling on hands and knees, and pursued their journey thus for some distance along the smooth and slippery rock.

Finally they found that they could walk upright, the mountain seeming to have been split by some convulsion of nature into a long, narrow chasm, twenty feet high and barely four wide.

And as they suddenly turned to the right, and then a few yards on to the left, and then went straight on, they saw, shining from afar off, a glimmer of light which they knew must be the opening into the canyon.

A faint daylight showed them their way just here, and by it, Kit looking up, saw, in the wall, an opening, to which he called Frank's attention.

"There is where those two unfortunates fell through, Frank, I guess."

"Yes, there is no doubt of that."

"We will doubtless find their bodies at the foot of the cliff, where the waterfall plunged down."

"You have the crowbar, Dan?"

"Yes."

"I'm glad of that. I'd not like to trust my weight to a rusty spike."

"The water confined by these narrow walls must rush through here furiously."

"I should think so."

"Those two wretches were doubtless hurried away like a flash, when they fell in, and were hurled through that opening before they could comprehend what had happened."

"Well, they deserved it."

And thus conversing they walked on, finally coming to the opening and looking out.

The spikes were there, driven into the crannies of the rock, but so rusted that they would not have borne any considerable weight, so they planted the crowbar in a deep crack, where it stood firm, and then looked at one another and burst out laughing.

There was not a single piece of rope in the party, and one of them would undoubtedly have to go to The Gulch after a coil.

But suddenly Kit, telling Frank to follow him, retraced his steps until he came to his cavern, into which, with Frank's assistance, he managed to climb, and soon reappeared with a long piece of stout rope that was strong enough to hold two or three times his weight.

With this they easily made the descent, and looking carefully for the bodies, and not finding them, came to the conclusion that they must be at the bottom of the pool.

So, giving up the search, they walked on down the creek until they came to the mound, and there, Dan, leaning over as Jordan had done, scooped up a handful of gold and showed it to his companions, saying:

"The deposit must be a couple of feet thick here, close to the bank."

"What must it be at the middle?"

"About three yards, I guess," said Frank.

"I'd like to go fishing there for a while!"

"You can, Frank, whenever you want to."

"Whatever I have you three boys can share with me, you know that."

"Oh, let that matter drop, Kit, or I'll get real mad."

"Come on, and let's visit the wonderful and weird cabin."

They found everything as it had been described to them, but Frank came near getting his head blown off as he rashly entered the cabin, for the weapon held by the dummy was discharged, and it was only because it had not been accurately aimed that the bullet did not reach its mark.

Frank, however, became very indignant and immediately proceeded to "kick the stuffin'" out of the figure, as he expressed it, and the dummy was soon a total wreck.

Leaving everything as they found it, and coming to the conclusion that the two men had surely perished, they again returned to the place where they had entered and climbed up the rope, bearing with them, as the sole memento of their visit, the handful of gold that Dan had secured.

And during all the time that they had been in the canyon a pair of basilisk eyes followed their every movement, as the maniac watched them closely.

Returning to Dainty, they told her that Worthington was undoubtedly dead, and that all in the canyon was as it had been pictured and it was without a single living occupant.

And then they held a consultation, Kit and Dainty begging Dan, Charley and Frank to take possession of the canyon and secure a competence at least; but the three steadily refused, until, finally, Kit made them a proposition.

"I am very anxious to visit Europe; and Dainty also. If I have no one to look after my interests here I can not take this trip. Now, I will for-

a company, consisting of you three and myself, and will give you an equal share with me if you will remain here and work and manage the placer-diggings in the canyon. What do you say to this?"

"There is but one thing we can say," answered Frank, speaking for himself as well as for his companions; "we accept, and will work for you. But we three will not take more than one-half of the whole, leaving the other half for you."

"Then to stop all further argument, I will accept your conditions. We will go to Denver and draw up the papers and then I will say good-by for a time. We will stop up the upper hole, thus closing the entrance to the canyon until you return."

And so, in a day or two, all of their matters were settled up, in and about The Gulch, and the five started for Denver, reaching there in safety and transacting their business in a short time, with the aid of an excellent lawyer.

Then Kit and Dainty left them, and started East, after many good wishes and promises to return soon, while the two brothers and Dan went back to The Gulch, where The Broadway existed no longer; and when the winter's snows came they determined to await the spring before commencing their operations, which were successful beyond their highest hopes.

And in the Weird Canyon, the maniac, Craig Colton, dragged out a miserable existence, being thus terribly punished for his many crimes.

THE END.

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